



Why UN Sanctions Against North Korea Are Wrong. « The Americanization of the Korean Peninsula »

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“What the U.S. really wants is not the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula but the Americanization of the Korean peninsula.” “DPRK foreign minister [1]

After successfully concluding negotiations with China to craft a new raft of international sanctions against North Korea, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power stepped in front of reporters to declare that the northeast Asian country, “one of the most brutal regimes the world has ever known,” would not be allowed to achieve “its declared goal of developing nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles. The international community cannot allow” this to happen, she said. “The United States will not allow this to happen.” [2]

A week later, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issued a resolution imposing the new tranche of sanctions on “the most sanctioned nation in the world,” as George W. Bush had once called North Korea. [3] “The resolution,” noted the Wall Street Journal, “mandates countries to inspect all cargo to and from North Korea, cut off shipments of aircraft and rocket fuel, ban all weapons sales and restrict all revenues to the government unless for humanitarian purposes.” [4] Bush had promised that “the most sanctioned nation in the world” would “remain the most sanctioned nation in the world.” [5] The Security Council agreed.

Since 1998, North Korea has conducted four nuclear tests, the latest on January 6, and has launched six rockets capable of carrying satellites into orbit (which the United States has called disguised ballistic missile tests.) But over the same period, the United States has developed new precision-guided “dial-a-yeild” nuclear weapons to make their use more thinkable, built new non-nuclear weapons of mass destruction, and spent \$8 billion annually to maintain and modernize its nuclear arsenal. At the same time, numerous countries have launched satellites into orbit and some have tested long range ballistic missiles. So why is North Korea singled out, while the United States and a number of its allies continue to test rocket technology and bolster their nuclear arsenals?

There are no legitimate grounds which justify the March 2, 2016 round of sanctions the Security Council imposed on North Korea. The beleaguered country’s nuclear weapons testing and satellite launch violate no international law and present no realistic threat to the United States or its allies, a reality acknowledge by its own generals and the country’s newspaper of record. North Korea legitimately withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which bans countries which do not have nuclear weapons from developing them in exchange for assistance in developing peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

North Korea is therefore under no international obligation to refrain from using nuclear technology for military purposes. Neither is the country in violation of any law prohibiting the use of rockets to loft satellites into orbit. No such law exists. And while the rocket North Korea used to launch a satellite last month was not a ballistic missile, there are no laws which prohibit ballistic missile development, possession, or testing.

Many countries use rockets to launch satellites, and several have developed or possess ballistic missiles. A number of countries have nuclear weapons, most of which, the United States excepted, maintain their nuclear arsenals with the sole stated intention of deterring aggression and preventing nuclear blackmail. North Korea says its nuclear weapons are purely defensive. This is credible. Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal is too small, and its means of delivering warheads too uncertain, for the country to initiate a nuclear exchange and hope to survive. The United States, in contrast, refuses to rule out the first-use deployment of nuclear arms and has repeatedly threatened North Korea with nuclear annihilation, the principal reason the northeast Asian country has taken recourse to developing a nuclear weapons program as a means of self-defense.

North Korea has faced repeated threats of nuclear and conventional attack by the United States.

- In 1993, the U.S. Strategic Command announced it was targeting some of its ICBMs on North Korea. [6]
- In 2001, the Bush administration identified North Korea as a possible target of nuclear attack (along with Libya, Syria, China, Russia, Iran and Iraq.) [7]
- According to the Stimson Center, a U.S. public policy think-tank, from 1970 to 2010, the United States threatened North Korea with nuclear destruction on six separate occasions. [8]
- On one occasion the United States' top soldier, Colin Powell, warned North Korea that the United States could turn it into a "charcoal briquette." [9]

Additionally, the United States issued a virtual declaration of war against North Korea in 2002, when the Bush administration declared the country part of an "Axis of Evil," along with Iran and Iraq. One of these countries, Iraq, was soon invaded and occupied by the United States and Britain on the basis of a tissue of lies. The United States and Britain alleged that the country had concealed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in defiance of a Security Council resolution ordering their destruction. In fact, Iraq had eliminated its WMD arsenals, leaving itself virtually defenceless against attack, a vulnerability Washington and London exploited. Following the invasion, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Arms Control, John Bolton, warned North Korea to draw the appropriate lesson [10], strengthening the threat of aggression implied in the original designation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea's official name, or DPRK) as an Axis of Evil state.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

North Korea joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985. The treaty, in force since March 5, 1970, commits treaty members "to pursue negotiations in good faith on measures relating to...nuclear disarmament." The treaty divides signatories into two categories: Nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear weapon states, based on whether they have "manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January, 1967." States with pre-1967 nuclear weapons are designated nuclear weapon states, and include the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France. Countries that had

no nuclear weapons prior to 1967 are called non-nuclear weapon states, even if they acquired nuclear weapons subsequent to that date.

The treaty requires that non-nuclear weapon states (at least while they remain members of the treaty) refrain from manufacturing or otherwise acquiring nuclear weapons. In exchange for making this commitment, they are to receive technical advice, know-how and other assistance from nuclear weapon states in developing peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

For their part, nuclear weapon states are under a number of obligations: first, to help members who don't have nuclear technology to develop civilian nuclear energy industries if they want them; and second, to pursue negotiations in good faith on measures relating to nuclear disarmament. The preamble of the treaty also obligates all states to forebear from using the threat of force in their relations with other countries. The preamble specifically recalls "that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, states must refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

Have the nuclear weapon states fulfilled their treaty obligations? Given the scant progress in nuclear disarmament over the 46 years the treaty has been in force, one would be hard pressed to answer in the affirmative. Despite lofty rhetoric about a nuclear-free world, none of the nuclear weapon states has taken any serious steps to significantly reduce their nuclear arsenals, to say nothing of moving toward disarmament. What's more, the prohibition against the use of military threat in international relations promulgated in the UN Charter, and referenced in the treaty's preamble, is regularly ignored.

US Threats Against North Korea

In 1993, the US Strategic Command announced that it was retargeting some of its strategic nuclear weapons away from the former Soviet Union to North Korea. A month later, Pyongyang announced that it would withdraw from the NPT, signaling that if Washington was going to dangle a nuclear sword of Damocles over its head, North Korea would take steps to counter the threat. [11] This spurred a series of negotiations which led Pyongyang to reverse its decision and to remain in the treaty. It eventually made another *volte-face*, announcing its intention to exit the treaty following US President George W. Bush's January 29, 2002 designation of North Korea as part of an Axis of Evil.

Bush's virtual declaration of war against the DPRK was only the tip of an iceberg of threats Washington had directed at the DPRK as part of its long running Cold War against the Communist country. In March 2002, the Los Angeles Times revealed classified Pentagon information listing seven countries as possible targets of a US nuclear strike. Among the targets was North Korea. The Pentagon's nuclear strike list also included Russia, China, Syria, Libya, Iran, and Iraq. [12] North Korean officials explained their withdrawal from the NPT by pointing to the "Bush administration's nuclear attack plan" which "showed that the United States...is pursuing world domination with force of arms and that the United States is not hesitant in launching a nuclear attack on any nation if it is regarded as an obstacle to this end." [13]

Echoing these concerns, a North Korean diplomat explained his country's decision to exit the NPT and embark on the development of nuclear weapons.

The NPT clearly states that nuclear power states cannot use nuclear weapons for the purpose of threatening or endangering non-nuclear states. So the DPRK thought that if we joined the NPT, we would be able to get rid of the nuclear threat from the US. Therefore we joined. However, the US never withdrew its right of pre-emptive nuclear strike. They always said that, once US interests are threatened, they always have the right to use their nuclear weapons for pre-emptive purposes. [14]

He added:

The world situation changed again after 11 September 2001. After this, Bush said that if the US wants to protect its safety, then it must remove the 'Axis of Evil' countries from the earth. The three countries he listed as members of this 'Axis of Evil' were Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Having witnessed what happened in Afghanistan and Iraq, we came to realise that we couldn't put a stop to the threat from the US with conventional weapons alone. So we realised that we needed our own nuclear weapons in order to defend the DPRK and its people. [15]

The NPT allows states to exit the accord if they believe their continued participation in it is injurious to their highest interests. "Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country." Clearly, Washington's overt hostility, the listing of North Korea as a target of a possible nuclear strike, and the Bush administration's virtual declaration of war, constituted "extraordinary events" which jeopardized the DPRK's "supreme interests."

Why Do Countries Develop Nuclear Weapons?

North Korea says it developed nuclear weapons "to protect its sovereignty and vital rights from the U.S. nuclear threat and hostile policy which have lasted for more than half a century" [16] and which culminated in the Bush administration's nuclear saber rattling and threat of war.

Compare North Korea's reasons for having nuclear weapons with those of Britain, one of the NPT's nuclear weapon states. The UK government's 2006 White Paper, "The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent," states that "The primary responsibility of any government is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens," and that "For 50 years (Britain's) independent nuclear deterrent has provided the ultimate assurance of (the country's) national security." "The UK's nuclear weapons," the document concludes, are designed "to deter and prevent nuclear blackmail and acts of aggression against our vital interests that cannot be countered by other means." [17]

Russia, also a nuclear weapon state, invokes the same rationale for maintaining a nuclear arsenal. The country's president, Vladimir Putin, says Russia needs nuclear arms to preserve its deterrent and strategic stability in the face of threats. [18] Similarly, Washington's 2015 National Security Strategy declares that "the United States must invest the resources necessary to maintain....a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent that preserves strategic ability."

The rationale of nuclear weapon states for maintaining a stock of nuclear weapons "applies with even greater force to weak states that may come under threat from stronger ones. The

smaller and weaker the state, the greater the need for nuclear weapons to make potential aggressors think twice before threatening or invading them.” Pointing specifically to Britain, researcher David Morrison argues, if “one of the strongest states in this world needs to have nuclear weapons in order to deter potential aggressors, then no state in the world should be without them, if at all possible.” Morrison caps his point by speculating that: “Had Iraq succeeded in developing nuclear weapons, the US/UK would not have invaded in March 2003 (and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who died as a consequence would still be alive).” [19]

Of course, it’s impossible to know how history would have unfolded had Iraq been in a position to present the possibility of a nuclear counter-strike as a deterrent to Washington’s drive to war, but the idea that nuclear weapons can deter aggression is not implausible. In 2010, General Kevin P. Chilton, at the time head of US Strategic Command, reminded Washington Post columnist Walter Pincus that, “Throughout the 65-year history of nuclear weapons, no nuclear power has been conquered or even put at risk of conquest.” [20] Explaining the grim logic that compels threatened and beleaguered countries like North Korea to reach for a nuclear sword, Putin wrote in RIA Novosti on February 27, 2012: “If I have the A-bomb in my pocket, nobody will touch me because it’s more trouble than it is worth. And those who don’t have the bomb might have to sit and wait for ‘humanitarian intervention’. Whether we like it or not, foreign interference suggests this train of thought.” [21] Echoing Putin’s analysis, the chief of the Israeli army’s planning division, Major General Amir Eshel, observed “Who would have dared deal with Qaddafi or Saddam Hussein if they had a nuclear capability? No way.” [22]

Learning The Lesson Of Iraq (And Libya)

On the day Baghdad fell to invading US forces, one of the Bush administration’s chief war mongers, John Bolton, warned Iran, Syria and North Korea to “draw the appropriate lesson.” [23] North Korea drew a lesson, though not the one Bolton intended. The real lesson, namely, that disarming is an invitation to an invasion, was reinforced eight years later when NATO secretly armed Islamist militants and launched an air war to oust Muamar Gaddafi in 2011, after the Libyan leader, in a misguided attempt to curry favor with the West, dismantled his weapons of mass destruction, leaving his country vulnerable to attack. Saddam Hussein made the same blunder in Iraq a decade earlier. DPRK diplomat Yongho Thae asks:

What happened to Libya? When Gaddafi wanted to improve Libya’s relations with the US and UK, the imperialists said that in order to attract international investment he would have to give up his weapons programs. Gaddafi even said that he would visit the DPRK to convince us to give up our nuclear program. But once Libya dismantled all its nuclear programs and this was confirmed by Western intelligence, the West changed its tune. [24]

Rudiger Frank, a professor of East Asian Economy and Society at the University of Vienna, argues that three signal events in the last two decades have underscored for Pyongyang that the decision it took to develop nuclear weapons was the right one.

The first such instance was Gorbachev’s foolish belief that his policies to end the arms race and confrontation with the West would be rewarded by respect for the Soviet Union’s existence and support for its faltering economy. On the contrary, his empire was destroyed piece by piece by Western support of anti-

communist governments in its European satellites and independence movements in various (now former) Soviet Republics. In the end, the reformer was ousted, NATO was expanded, and his once mighty country was weakened and ridiculed. Others had an even less desirable fate, such as Romania's Ceausescu or East Germany's Honecker.

The second instance was Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Humiliated after a quick defeat in the First Gulf War, Hussein accepted Western control over about half of his airspace in 1991 and had to suffer regular small-scale attacks on ground targets for more than a decade. Sanctions led to the "oil for food" program of 1995. However, his compliance did not save Hussein's regime from allegations of hiding weapons of mass destruction, and ultimately from complete annihilation in the Second Gulf War.

Now, there is Libya's Gaddafi. It was not so long ago that it was popular in political circles to urge Kim Jong Il to follow Gaddafi's example. On February 14, 2005, the conservative South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo even reported that then ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and current UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, was sent to Libya to urge Mr. Gaddafi to visit North Korea and persuade Kim Jong Il to abandon his nuclear weapons. The Libyan dictator as an ambassador of disarmament and peace—how was that possible? In December 2003, after long negotiations with the West, Libya had surprisingly announced that it would give up its programs for developing weapons of mass destruction and allow unconditional inspections. This earned Gaddafi immediate praise from Washington and London, followed by a prestigious invitation to Paris in December 2007, where he met President Sarkozy twice. [25]

The culmination of Gaddafi's attempts to ingratiate himself with the West was his murder at the hands of NATO's proxy jihadists, but not before one of their number sodomized him with a knife.

None of this was lost on the North Koreans. A February 21, 2013 commentary by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency noted that, "The tragic consequences in those countries which abandoned halfway their nuclear programs, yielding to the high-handed practices and pressure of the U.S. in recent years, clearly prove that the DPRK was very far-sighted and just when it made the option. They also teach the truth that the U.S. nuclear blackmail should be countered with substantial countermeasures, not with compromise or retreat." [26] An article in the February 22, 2013 issue of Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of the DPRK's ruling Workers Party observed that, "Had it not been the nuclear deterrence of our own, the U.S. would have already launched a war on the peninsula as it had done in Iraq and Libya and plunged it into a sorry plight as (Yugoslavia) at the end of the last century and Afghanistan early in this century." [27]

The North Koreans make the case, not unconvincingly, that far from increasing the likelihood of war on the Korean peninsula, its development of nuclear weapons has done the opposite; it has deterred the US drive to use military force to topple a government which rejects its hegemony. "After the US/UK invasion of Iraq in March 2003, North Korea's foreign ministry declared that 'the Iraqi war shows that to allow disarmament through inspections does not help avert a war, but rather sparks it,' concluding that 'only a tremendous military deterrent force' can prevent attacks on states the US dislikes." [28] In April 2010, the KCNA declared that, "The DPRK's access to nukes provided so effective a deterrent that the danger of outbreak of a war drastically dwindled on the Korean Peninsula. This represented the efforts exerted by the DPRK to defuse the nuclear threat at the present phase of

detering the U.S. nukes with its own nukes, not making a verbal appeal only.” [29] And in August 2013, the news agency noted that, “The U.S. nuclear warmongers have threatened more than once that it would mount a pre-emptive nuclear attack on the DPRK without prior warning. A nuclear war has not broken out on the peninsula entirely because the DPRK has steadily bolstered up its war deterrence.” [30]

Double Standards

“It is ironic,” noted Walter Pincus, that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, “meeting in Baghdad to dissuade Iran from moving toward a nuclear weapon, are all modernizing their stockpiles.” And now these same nuclear weapon states have imposed new sanctions on North Korea to punish it for doing the same. And yet, the “United States has a multi-billion-dollar program to upgrade its three major nuclear warheads and a more costly effort to build new land, sea and air strategic delivery systems. France is modernizing its nuclear bombs and missiles as well as its strategic submarine... Russia and China are modernizing, too.” [31] So much for nuclear weapon states working toward disarmament, as the NPT requires.

US President Barack Obama has “promised...to spend \$80 billion over 10 years to maintain and modernize the nation’s nuclear arsenal...” [32] while ally Britain “announced contract awards of \$595 million to begin design of replacements for its four nuclear submarines that carry Trident sub-launched ballistic missiles,” even though it is “in the midst of an austerity program that includes cutting education, health and retirement programs.” [33]

Not only is the United States modernizing its nuclear weapons arsenal, it is also developing new WMD. The Pentagon has been working on a precision-guided atom bomb designed, as the New York Times puts it, “with problems like North Korea in mind.” The “bomb’s explosive force can be dialed up or down depending on the target, to minimize collateral damage.” Owing to the weapon’s “smaller yields and better targeting,” it is more tempting to use. The bomb, called the B61, “is the first of five new warhead types planned as part of an atomic revitalization estimated to cost up to \$1 trillion over three decades. As a family, the weapons and their delivery systems move toward the small, the stealthy and the precise,” making their use “more thinkable.” [34]

The Pentagon is also at work on non-nuclear WMD “approaching the level of strategic nuclear arms in their strike capability.” [35] The new class of weapons, termed “`Prompt Global Strike`” could be fired from the United States and hit a target anywhere in less than an hour.” The new weapons would “give the president a non-nuclear option for, say, a ... pre-emptive attack on...North Korea,” achieving the effects of a nuclear weapon, without, it is hoped, “turning a conventional war into a nuclear one.” [36]

The United States, unlike North Korea, refuses to disavow the first strike use of nuclear weapons. Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein pressed Barack Obama in 2010 to declare that the sole purpose of the United States` nuclear arsenal is to deter the threat of nuclear attack. The White House refused. The furthest it would go was to say that deterring nuclear aggression was the primary purpose of the arsenal, but not the only one. The Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, who claims he aspires to a world without nuclear weapons, was not even willing to say that the United States wouldn’t be the first to use nuclear arms, or to refrain from using them against non-nuclear weapon states. [37]

Satellite Launch

“More than 100 space vehicles are put into the orbit around the earth by carrier rockets in a year on an average worldwide,” [38] but only North Korea’s satellite launch has been singled out for condemnation by the Security Council. Even India’s 2012 test of a long-range ballistic missile (different from North Korea’s satellite launch vehicle in having a military and not peaceful intent), which Indian officials boasted gave them “the capability of sending a nuclear warhead as far as China’s capital, Beijing, for the first time,” was not condemned. On the contrary, NATO expressed no opposition while Washington praised India’s “‘solid’ non-proliferation record,” [39] an altogether incomprehensible accolade to bestow on a country that has never belonged to the NPT, is estimated to have 90-110 warheads [40], and now has the ability to deliver them over long ranges.

A distinction should be made between a space launch vehicle used to loft a satellite, space station, or manned vehicle into space, and a ballistic missile, used to send an explosive to a distant point on earth. Both use ballistic rockets, but a ballistic missile has a different guidance system and a heat shield to protect its payload from burning up on re-entering earth’s atmosphere.

In order for its nuclear weapons to act as a deterrent against aggression, North Korea needs a means to deliver a warhead. Since it has no long-range bombers, an obvious choice is an intercontinental ballistic missile, of the kind India tested, and which the United States, Russia, France, and China have, and which Israel is suspected to have. An ICBM relies on ballistic rocket technology. Hence, any country that successfully develops a space launch vehicle is part way to developing a ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear payload. But it hasn’t quite got there. It also needs to develop an appropriate guidance system and a heat shield. Plus, it would have to work out how to miniaturize a warhead to fit atop the missile. It’s not clear how far away North Korea is from developing a miniaturized warhead and an ICBM on top of which to place it, but the United States aims to stop it from getting there for the obvious reason that with a reliable means of delivering a nuclear payload the deterrent value of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal is all the stronger.

International law does not prohibit countries from using rocket technology for the peaceful use of outer space, and it surely doesn’t prohibit North Korea uniquely. Nor are there laws banning the testing of ballistic missiles. The Security Council, in passing a resolution imposing sanctions on Pyongyang, in part, for Pyongyang’s satellite launch, has acted *ultra vires*, that is, beyond its authority. “Where in the UN Charter is the mandate investing the UNSC with the right to deprive an individual UN member nation of the right to use space for peaceful purposes, a right specified in international law, stipulated?” asks North Korea’s Foreign Ministry. [41] “The DPRK’s H-bomb and satellite launch are being termed a breach of the previous ‘resolutions’ of the UNSC but, in essence, those ‘resolutions’ are a product of high-handedness practiced beyond the mandate of the UNSC.” [42]

The Security Council has arrogated onto itself authority to dictate who can and cannot launch a satellite, who can and cannot test ballistic missiles, and who can and cannot have nuclear weapons; in other words, it has unilaterally assigned to itself without the consent of the UN member states the authority to decide which state has and does not have a sovereign right to defend itself. The Security Council has no basis in international law to exercise this authority. “If the UNSC has the mandate to ban an individual country from conducting a nuclear test,” asks the North Koreans tartly, “what does the NPT exist for and what is the nuclear test ban treaty necessary for?” [43]

A Brutal Regime?

In declaring that the United States will never allow North Korea to develop nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles, Samantha Power called the DPRK “one of the most brutal regimes the world has ever known.” Is it?

North Korea has a publicly-owned, planned, economy directed toward satisfying the material needs of its citizens while preserving its sovereignty. With a history of colonization by Japan and alienated from its compatriots in the south by the United States’ division of the peninsula, North Korea holds independence as an especially important goal. US troops have been almost continually present in South Korea since 1945, and the Pentagon retains wartime command of the South Korean military. By contrast, there are no foreign troops or bases in North Korea, and North Korean troops have never fought beyond Korean borders, unlike South Korea’s military, which took on a mercenary role in the Vietnam War, joining the United States in an aggression to suppress the independence struggle of another people which had suffered colonization, the Indo-Chinese. From 1964 to 1973, approximately 312,000 South Korean troops were deployed to Vietnam, paid 23 times their base pay by the United States. It is not without justification that North Korea reviles South Korea as a puppet state. And while South Korea nestles under a US nuclear umbrella, North Korea has never been protected by the nuclear weapons of another state’s military.

The DPRK offers attractions typical of communist countries: free health care, free education, free housing, and virtually free public transportation. [44] A pastiche of half-truths and outright distortions circulate in the Western media about North Korea, distinguished only by their contempt for the intelligence of the public. Events regarded as anodyne in the West are presented in dark and menacing hues when they happen in the DPRK. This has long been true. Observers of North Korea have for decades complained about deceptions in Western media and discourse about North Korea, aimed at tarring the country’s reputation rather than illuminating its politics, history and economy. Anna Louise Strong wrote “In days to come, Korea will continue to supply headlines. Yet there is little public knowledge about the country and most of the headlines distort rather than reveal the facts.” [45] That was in 1949. Little has changed. But then, propagandistic treatment of communist, socialist and economically nationalist states is the accustomed practice of Western media, whose owners’ interests have always been against states which insist on exercising economic sovereignty in preference to subordination to the profit-making interests of Western financial and business concerns.

There’s more than a little hypocrisy in Power claiming that the United States spearheaded a Security Council resolution out of opposition to a “brutal regime,” when Washington counts the brutal regimes of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Israel, and Colombia among its favored satellites, not only sheltering these oppressors and bellicists from sanction, but facilitating their brutalities. The words Hiroshima, Korea, Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, 100 or more prisoners tortured to death in US detention in the ‘war on terror’, extra-judicial assassinations by drone strike, to say nothing of the genocide of North America’s aboriginal people and the brutal slavery of Africans on which the country was founded, make the United States truly one of the most brutal regimes the world has ever known. It is followed closely by its allies, and fellow Security Council permanent members, Britain and France, on whose empires the sun never set and blood never dried.

What’s Washington’s Real Problem With North Korea?

The pretext for singling North Korea out for sanction is that it is a threat, but this, like the

claim that Saddam Hussein had concealed WMD in defiance of a UNSC resolution, is pure eye-wash. It has no truth-value, only value as propaganda for justifying continuing US aggression against a country that refuses to give up public ownership and economic planning or surrender its political and economic sovereignty to the United States. In his February 23, 2016 testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, the Commander of the US Pacific Command Harry B. Harris Jr. said that “North Korea is not an existential threat to the United States.” [46] US establishment journalist David E. Sanger, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a Wall Street think tank for the US State Department, explained that neither are North Korea’s nuclear weapons a threat to South Korea or Japan, “because North Korean officials know their government would be decimated in minutes or hours” if they attacked either of these two US allies. [47] As to the threat posed by North Korea’s conventional forces, Korea specialist Tim Beal points out that,

The available evidence shows that North Korea is in most respects much weaker militarily than the South, and the balance between the two shifts hugely in the South’s favor in the crucial aspect of advanced technology equipment. But a limited comparison of North and South is really meaningless because this is essentially a question of North Korea versus the United States – an attack by North Korea on the South would inevitably be a declaration of war against the United States. The U.S. has “operational command” of the South Korean military in the event of war, there are 28,500 U.S. military personnel (and considerably more civilians) stationed there and there is the over-riding geopolitical imperative – the U.S. would not tolerate the establishment of an independent Korea by force.

What is certain, however, is that North Korea cannot use nuclear weapons in an offensive manner because the retaliation would be overwhelming. One cannot use a handful of nuclear weapons, of uncertain efficacy and with unproven delivery systems, against an adversary with thousands of nuclear weapons and well-tested delivery systems. North Korea cannot effectively threaten the United States or indeed South Korea (because of the U.S. nuclear umbrella) with nuclear weapons. [48]

The relationship of the United States to North Korea is a complex and multi-dimensional one. Wall Street-dominated Washington sees the DPRK as offering nothing in the way of profit-making opportunities to please U.S. investors, and hence, has no motivation to accept the North Korean status quo. This explains why for decades the United States has maintained sanctions on the DPRK for the reason that it has “a Marxist-Leninist economy.” David Straub, director of the State Department’s Korea desk from 2002 to 2004 explained that “U.S. administrations have never considered and will never consider establishing a strategic relationship with the DPRK. North Korea’s closed economic and social system means the country has virtually nothing of value to offer the United States.” [49]

Presenting North Korea as a threat allows the US military-industrial complex to justify massive defense spending and to reap huge profits from US taxpayers through a fraud at whose center reposes the myth of the North Korean threat. Colin Powell, as the United States’ top soldier, once infamously remarked that after the demise of the Soviet Union he was down to only a few demons, Castro and (North Korea’s) Kim Il-Sung. [50] Portraying North Korea as belligerent, provocative and threatening justifies the United States’ continued military presence on the Korean peninsula, where, as Tim Beal observes, “China, Japan, Russia and the United States meet and contest and as such is the most strategically valuable place on earth.” [51]

China is the main target. “The focus of our rhetoric is North Korea,” observes Steven Hildreth, a researcher with the Congressional Research Service, a think-tank for the US Congress. “The reality is that we’re also looking longer term at the elephant in the room, which is China.” [52] The Pentagon is eager to deploy a Lockheed Martin manufactured anti-ballistic missile system called THAAD (terminal high altitude area defense) on the Korean peninsula, and is using North Korea as a pretext. THAAD is obviously aimed at neighboring China—at least that’s how the Chinese see it, a suspicion strengthened by the United States’ strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific region to “balance” China’s rise. Pyongyang also sees THAAD as targeted against China, but also itself and Russia. [53] We need not wonder what the reaction of the United States would be to China deploying an anti-ballistic missile system in Cuba or Mexico.

The only domain in which North Korea is a threat is ideology. Some background, to explain. The history of world economic development is one of income divergence, not convergence. The core capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America have grown faster than the rest of the world over the last two centuries, a period during which the world economy became increasingly integrated under the domination of the Great Powers of Europe and the United States, which carved up the world among themselves in formal colonial and later neo-colonial arrangements. Rather than bringing the poorer countries closer to the rich ones, the integration of the poor countries into a Western-led global capitalist economy has spelled lower rates of growth for the poor countries than capitalist core countries have enjoyed themselves, suggesting a process of exploitation and transfer of wealth from the periphery to the core. Only “a few countries that were poor in 1800 have joined the prosperous,” notes economic historian Robert C. Allen. “These include Japan, its former colonies South Korea and Taiwan.” [54] To the list can be added China.

The Soviet Union broke free of the world capitalist economic system, partly of its own volition, but largely because it was shunned by the capitalist world, to chart an independent course of economic development based on public-ownership and planning and enjoyed high rates of growth as a consequence from 1928, the point its economy became socialist, through the 1970s, with the exception of the extraordinary years of WWII. It continued on a path of unremitting positive growth while capitalist countries went through boom and bust cycles, alternately swelling and shrinking their labor forces, regularly tossing people who needed jobs on the scrap heap. By contrast, the Soviet Union’s socialist system maintained a full-employment, monotonically expanding economy right up to the point Mikhail Gorbachev dismantled socialism in a misguided and spectacularly unsuccessful attempt to spur growth rates in the late 1980s. Only when Gorbachev dismantled socialism did the Soviet economy collapse. [55]

South Korea and Taiwan also enjoyed high rates of growth and, in some respects, for the same reasons the Soviet Union did. The United States was willing to give these former Japanese colonies a degree of economic freedom it was unwilling to tolerate elsewhere. As these countries were on the front line of the Cold War, it was necessary that they become showcases for the capitalist system. South Korea profited immensely from US investment during the Vietnam War. Additionally, it was allowed to adopt a Soviet model of multi-year planning and state investment in heavy industry to spur growth. US officials were willing to indulge South Korea because until the 1970s it embarrassed Washington by lagging behind its Communist compatriots in the north, hardly a paean to the merits of the capitalist system South Korea’s US patrons so desperately sought.

China, for all the talk of its going capitalist, has also managed to follow a path of high

growth, through a program of *dirigisme* scorned under the Washington Consensus of free-enterprise, free-trade and free-markets. The Chinese government, under the leadership of the Communist Party, remains enormously involved in the Chinese economy, through state-owned enterprises which dominate the country's economic life and through state planning.

As for Japan, it had the advantage of developing a capitalist system in a part of the world that was relatively remote from Western Europe and North America, thus partly sheltering it from Western attempts to yoke its labor, markets and resources to the economic interests of capitalists in Europe and the United States. Emulating the Western imperialist powers, Japan expanded its economic *lebensraum*, battling Russia for domination of Manchuria and Korea, colonizing Taiwan, and finally conquering much of East Asia. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the United States bolstered the economic growth of its former foe, fearing Japan would follow China, North Korea and North Vietnam down the Communist road unless high rates of growth and prosperity were achieved.

Hence, in order to build economies that serve the interests of their people, rather than those of investors and bankers abroad, the leaders of several poor countries mobilized their people to free themselves from the oppressions of imperialism. During the 1960s and 1970s the Soviet development model inspired former colonies that fought for and won their political independence. Many of these countries received substantial aid from the Soviet Union and its socialist allies.

There are only a few countries left in that tradition, and all of them are targets of a post-Cold War US mopping up operation, designed to bring the few remaining countries that have remained outside the United States' informal empire into Washington's—or more precisely, Wall Street's— orbit. Economically, US rulers have an interest in bringing North Korea into a US-superintended sphere of exploitation accessible to Wall Street and corporate America, one in which the DPRK's "Marxist-Leninist" economy is supplanted by an arrangement presided over by South Korea-style puppets eagerly prepared to sell out the country to foreign investors. More importantly, the United States has a motivation to make *Communist, independent*, North Korea suffer, stifle its development, cripple its economy and sabotage its growth, in order to falsely attribute the ensuing travails to "economic mismanagement" and the "inefficiencies of socialism." The goal is to sustain the longstanding capitalist ideological project of defiling the reputation of public-ownership and economic planning so that North Korea is seen as a living example of socialism as a failed model.

What Should the UNSC Have Done Differently?

If the instigator and lead author of the punitive Security Council resolution against North Korea, the United States, was really interested in nuclear weapons non-proliferation, it would desist from issuing threats to launch wars of aggression and abandon its program of carrying them out around the globe. It would no longer dangle nuclear swords of Damocles over countries, or threaten to turn them into charcoal briquettes. It would end the practice of creating target lists of countries for possible nuclear attack. It would renounce the first strike use of nuclear weapons and take seriously its commitment under the NPT to undertake negotiations in good faith toward nuclear disarmament. And on the Korean peninsula, it would abandon its practice of conducting annual war games—which have the effect of forcing the DPRK onto a permanent war footing—and accept Pyongyang's pleas to supplant the armistice which ended hostilities in 1953 with an official treaty of peace. In other words, it would stop creating the conditions which compel threatened countries to arm

themselves with nuclear weapons in order to protect their economic and political sovereignty. Finally, it would withdraw its forces from Korea and allow Koreans to enjoy full sovereignty for the first time in 111 years.

The United States should do all these things, but won't, because it is under the compulsion of a capitalist economic and political system which drives it to assert leadership over—which is to say, to negate the sovereignty of—other countries. It does this in order to absorb their markets, resources, land, and labour for the aggrandizement of its corporate owning class rooted in Wall Street.

As to the other members of the Security Council, including Russia and China, they ought to refrain from participating in the undemocratic exercise of arrogating onto themselves authority beyond that consented to by UN member states and expressed in the UN Charter, to act as a dictatorial cabal, arbitrarily deciding who does, and does not, have a right of sovereignty and self-defense. These rights cannot be abrogated by the Security Council, and that North Korea has stood resolutely against the body's abuse of its authority and refuses to surrender to the multiple pressures thrust upon it by a raptorial United States, is surely worthy of the admiration and support of people who care about the fight to rid the world of imperialist oppression and the exploitation of man by man. Few nation states champion these goals—or stand up to bullies—any more. North Korea does.

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