

N. Korea clarifies intentions

Recent agitations show regime will not give up its nuclear program



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R-FULLERTON, IS
THE RANKING
MEMBER, HOUSE
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TERRORISM, TRADE,
AND LIMITING
NUCLEAR
PROLIFERATION.

Maybe it was the Memorial Day holiday weekend, but the network media coverage of North Korea's nuclear test was rather lackadaisical. North Korea's aims were reflexively reported as its typical cry for

attention and brinkmanship. Yet a bubbling North Korean leadership struggle is certainly at play. Discounted, too, was North Korea's very troubling relationship with Iran. These developments make North Korea a full-blown crisis.

Kim Jong-il's sickly appearance in public last month signaled that his days are numbered. Unlike when he came to power in 1994, clearly anointed by his father, this time succession is uncertain. Kim's brother-in-law and youngest son are taking more assertive roles in the powerful National Defense Commission, it's believed. Some speculate that the brother-in-law may take over as a "regent" until the son, age 26, can fully emerge. These two and the others jockeying for power aren't going to want to be seen as soft against the United States as they solidify their power base.

North Korean foreign policy, always aggressive, has lately included a long-range missile test, booting U.N. inspectors from the country and detaining two American journalists. Counterfeiting U.S. currency, missile proliferation, drug trafficking and other illicit activities have long been state-sanctioned enterprises. Now Pyongyang has conducted a second underground nuclear test in three years. Many expect manufactured North-South naval clashes to come next, rolling the Korean peninsula, where 25,000 U.S. troops are stationed.

Cooperation between Pyongyang and Tehran on missile technology is well docu-

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mented. Last August, India responded to a U.S. request to block from its airspace a North Korean plane bound for Iran. The plane reportedly carried long-range missile components.

It may be worse. North Korea built a clone of its Yongbyon nuclear reactor in Syria, which Israel destroyed in a 2007 airstrike. Many believe this reactor was financed by Iran. A North Korean sale of nuclear components, or even a complete nuclear device, to Iran isn't out of the question.

Some ascribe reports of nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Iran as speculation. But facts point in this direction. The motives certainly do. North Korea, its economy decrepit, could certainly use the cash, and Iran could speed its nuclear program.

The Obama administration must make it crystal-clear that the United States would hold Pyongyang fully accountable for the transfer of nuclear weapons or material to states or terrorist groups. Following North Korea's 2006 nuclear test, the Bush administration made such an announcement (but never followed through once Syria's reactor was exposed). Such a pronouncement so far has been oddly missing from President Barack Obama's statements.

So far, the administration has offered bland statements and is focused primarily on diplomacy at the United Nations. Recent history tells us we won't get much out of the Security Council. The U.S. can achieve far more by deploying measures to further undercut North Korea's economy and target its prolifer-

ation activities. Past attempts to squeeze Pyongyang's wallet have proven successful, when banks from across Asia refused to do business with the Dear Leader after a bank in Macau was shut down by U.S. sanctions for laundering counterfeit U.S. currency for North Korea. This effort was dropped in the belief that North Korea would bargain away its nuclear program. Press reports indicate that the Obama administration is "developing mechanisms" to replicate this effort. But why has it taken the White House this long just to consider such steps?

Our defenses must be bolstered. South Korea has finally taken the welcome step of joining the U.S.-led Proliferation Security Initiative, which aims to interdict missile and nuclear components on the high seas. Yet our last line of protection - missile defense - has been cut by the Obama administration. Expansion of the ground-based interceptor program in Alaska and California that would take out North Korean missiles aimed at the West Coast has been halted.

Some believe that the world can learn to live with a nuclear North Korea. This position tolerates the cascade of proliferation likely to result from South Korea, Japan and possibly others in the region. Japanese rearmament would not sit well with China. Further, North Korean nuclear weapons will likely find their way to the Middle East.

North Korea's latest nuclear test offers a silver lining: providing clarity of Pyongyang's intentions. North Korea, in the midst of a leadership struggle, has dropped the pretense of being willing to negotiate away its nuclear program. The sooner we recognize this, and focus in with a renewed effort to box North Korea out of the international financial system, the better. An inability for North Korea to access hard currency would mean that Kim Jong-il could neither pay his generals nor fund his nuclear and missile programs.

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