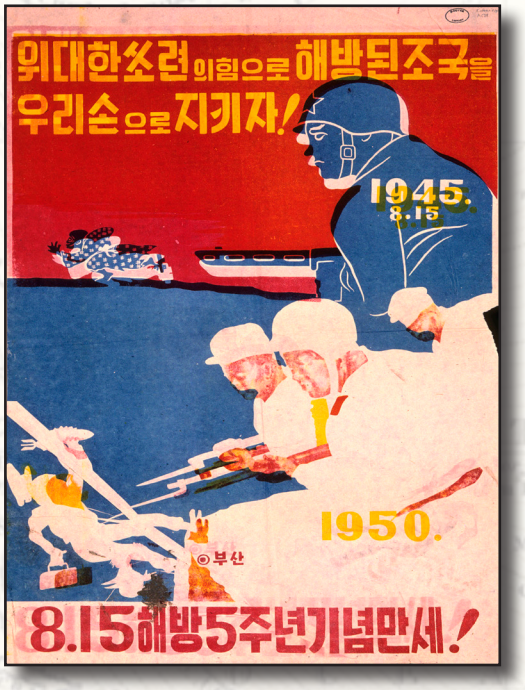

What exactly are the strategic aims that North Korea hopes to achieve by the possession of a few deployable nuclear weapons?

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

From the Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict at the Hoover Institution

Image: Hoover Archives Poster Collection: CC 137, Celebration of the occupation of South Korea on the fifth independence day

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of "War, Revolution, and Peace." Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: "The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life." From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the "Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict" has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution's dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.

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CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

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All Eyes on North Korea

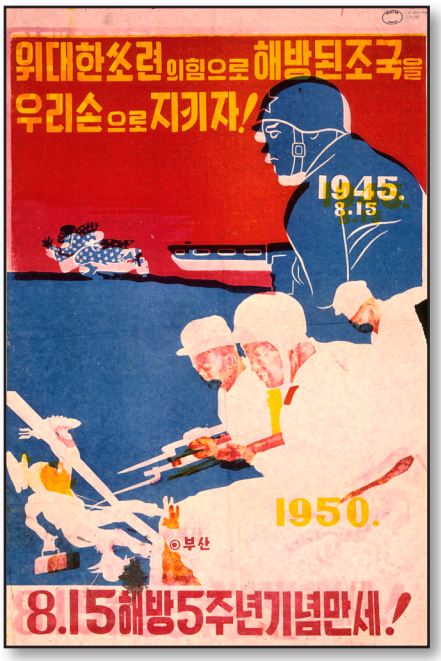
By Barry Strauss

North Korea is a peculiar place but it should not be considered in isolation. Although a small state, it takes part in regional relationships that go far back in history and in global networks of more recent vintage but great consequence. But what precisely is North Korea?

At first blush, North Korea looks like Sparta with nuclear weapons. Like Sparta it is a garrison state–communistic, militaristic, austere, isolated, secretive, totalitarian (much more efficiently so than its ancient counterpart), and often brutal to its own inhabitants. True, North Korea does not have helots, as Sparta's large population of serfs was called, but it does have prison camps and national priorities that put guns very far ahead of butter. Famine devastated North Korea in the 1990s, killing perhaps two million people or ten per cent of the population. Although the worst is over, reports of micro-famine and even cannibalism persist.

On second thought, the analogy is imperfect because Sparta was a constitutional monarchy offering a degree of political freedom to its citizen elite. Observers disagree as to whether North Korea is best characterized as communist, fascist or nationalist, but one thing is clear: since its founding in 1948, North Korea has been a hereditary dictatorship run by one family. Kim Il-sung (r. 1948-1994), known as the "Great Leader" and "Eternal President," his son Kim Jong-il (r. 1994-2011), known as the "Dear Leader" and "Supreme Leader," and his grandson Kim Jong-un (r. 2011-present), another "Supreme Leader," have been the sole rulers as well as the objects of a massive cult of personality. Sparta preferred gray, company men.

A pirate state may be a better analogy. Like pirates, North Korea engages in crime–in its case, blackmail. It uses the threat of nuclear weapons to get the outside world to provide the food and aid that it needs to keep going. Yet North Korea does not engage in a thoroughgoing war, let



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alone nuclear war, because that would end the game. Ancient Mediterranean pirates hated Rome but knew enough not to enrage it by helping the rebel gladiator Spartacus when he came calling. So too North Korea knows enough to limit its provocations. It learned its lesson from the Korean War (1950-1953), a North Korean invasion of South Korea that led to ruin.

Kim Il-sung promised Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin a great victory if Stalin unleashed him. Since 1945, when Japan's colonial empire collapsed, Korea was divided into two occupation zones at the 38th parallel. The Soviets occupied the northern zone and the Americans the southern zone. Lines hardened during the Cold War. In 1948 the United Nations supervised elections that set up two separate governments: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north and the Republic of Korea in the south. Each side aimed at reunifying the peninsula and extending its control to the other half. The year 1949 saw border skirmishes followed by heavy fighting along the 38th parallel but neither side was strong enough to conquer the other and both were restrained by their respective hegemons.

Then, in 1950, the Soviets changed their mind. After the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949, the Americans decided to withdraw from the Asian mainland and to build instead a defense perimeter in Japan, the Philippines, and other Pacific islands. Along with other factors such as the creation of NATO in April 1949 and the Soviet atom bomb in July 1949, American withdrawal convinced the Soviets to allow North Korea's leader, Kim Il-Sung, to invade the south.

The war that followed did not go as planned. Before the Korean War was over, both the Americans and Chinese sent massive numbers of ground troops to Korea while the Soviets and Amer-

icans fought an air war over North Korea. The North nearly conquered the South–twice. The Americans were nearly driven off the peninsula–twice. The Americans conquered North Korea before the Chinese drove them out in turn. Much of the 85,000-square-mile peninsula was devastated. Nearly 3 million people, soldiers and civilians, were killed, wounded, or went missing. In the end, the peninsula continued to be divided on only slightly different lines as before.

Since then, North Korea has continued to behave violently but in measured doses. It has attempted to assassinate several South Korean leaders, tunneled under the Demilitarized Zone that separates the two states, bombed a South Korean civilian airliner, and shelled a South Korean island. Armed to the teeth, it threatens the heart of South Korea without actually attacking it. The southern capital, Seoul, lies 35 miles south of the DMZ, about the distance of Palo Alto from San Francisco. The Seoul metropolitan area is not only South Korea's largest, but also home to half of the country's population.

As far as the United States, North Korea has, over the years, axe-murdered two American officers in the DMZ and boarded the USS *Pueblo*, an American ship that it claimed had entered its waters, and then held the crew hostage under tough conditions for nearly a year. In commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Korean War this year, the North has stepped up threats and bluster.

And then, there is the North Korean weapons program. After conducting three nuclear tests, North Korea is widely thought to have a small stockpile of nuclear weapons. It is also thought to have chemical weapons. North Korea has an extensive ballistic missile program that can reach South Korea and Japan and, according to North Korean claims, continental North America as well. American intelligence agencies are divided as to the truth of the claim, although the U.S. government is playing it safe by deploying more missile interceptors on the West Coast.

Intelligence officials also debate whether North Korea has mastered the technology of delivering any nuclear weapons by ballistic missile at all. But most expect that it will achieve that capability within five-ten years.

Nor does anyone doubt that North Korea sets a very bad example for a world that does not want to see nuclear weapons proliferate. Pakistan helped North Korea develop its nuclear weapons program. North Korea exports ballistic missiles widely to such countries as Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Egypt, and Vietnam.

What then, is North Korea's piracy all about? It aims at regime survival, certainly; a sense of power and importance, no doubt; and an attempt to move toward long-cherished regional goals as well as to settle scores. The nuclear weapons program is an insurance policy against all outsiders. It gains the attention of China and the United States, both of which are concerned about nuclear armament by Japan and South Korea in response to the North. North Korea's nuclear program might lead to war with the South and to a far broader conflict.

North Korea is twinned, of course, with South Korea. The two Koreas were unified for well over a thousand years before their division in 1945 and most Koreans consider the division of the peninsula unnatural. North Korea makes no bones about its desire to conquer the South and reunify the peninsula. As for the United States, the North considers it Enemy Number One, ever since the American invasion and air bombing campaign of the Korean War–not to mention the North's anti-capitalist ideology. Yet the Korean peninsula is in turn a piece of a larger puzzle, that of Northeast Asia–or perhaps it is the lynchpin.

Korea owns one of the world's most strategic and vulnerable locations. Like Poland, it is a medium-sized country that lies between great powers. Korea is a land bridge between China and Russia to the north and Japan to the south, which is separated from Korea by a strait only 120 miles wide. Over the centuries, invaders have attacked Korea from both directions, exploiting a vulnerability summed up by the Korean proverb that "when whales fight, the shrimp's back breaks." Japanese have called Korea "a dagger pointed at Japan" and Mao Zedong referred to Korea as "the lips to China's teeth."[1] In recent years the United States has played a big part in Korean affairs as well. China and Japan loomed large in Korean affairs far earlier, and before Russian power arose in northern Asia, the Mongols and Manchus rode in from the north and conquered Korea.

China is historically Korea's most important relation. China shaped many states lying on its periphery but none more so than Korea. For centuries, Korea was China's closest client state but also the most successful manager of its patron. North Korea's relationship with China is, if anything, more important than that of most Korean states in history. A massive infusion of Chinese ground troops saved North Korea from American invasion during the Korean War. The Soviet Union, to be sure, was North Korea's chief patron, but since the end of the USSR, China has been the most important ally.

And that brings up what may be the most peculiar thing about North Korea of all. Much of North Korea's leverage comes from the threat not of attack but of collapse. China fears that without foreign aid, North Korea will implode. The result will be a huge humanitarian, economic, and political problem. Many South Koreans feel similarly. They long for Korean reunification and they dread it. Many fear that the cost paid by West Germany for reintegrating East Germany would be minor compared to the cost of rebuilding the wreck that is North Korea.

1. David McCann and Barry S. Strauss, eds., *War and Democracy: A Comparative Study of the Korean War and the Peloponnesian War* (M. E. Sharpe, 2001), intro, p. 17 + xxviii n. 10.

One thing is certain. With its history, its ambition, its policies, its regional importance, and its international connections and repercussions, North Korea will keep the world's attention.

Barry Strauss (Cornell University) is a military historian with a focus on ancient Greece and Rome. His *Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* was named one of the best books of 2004 by the *Washington Post*. His books have been translated into nine languages. His latest book, *Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar and the Genius of Leadership* (Simon & Schuster, May 2012), was named one of the best books of 2012 by *Bloomberg*. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Korea Foundation, and the American Academy in Rome. In recognition of his scholarship, he was named an honorary citizen of Salamis, Greece.

Greetings, Americans: Understanding North Korea

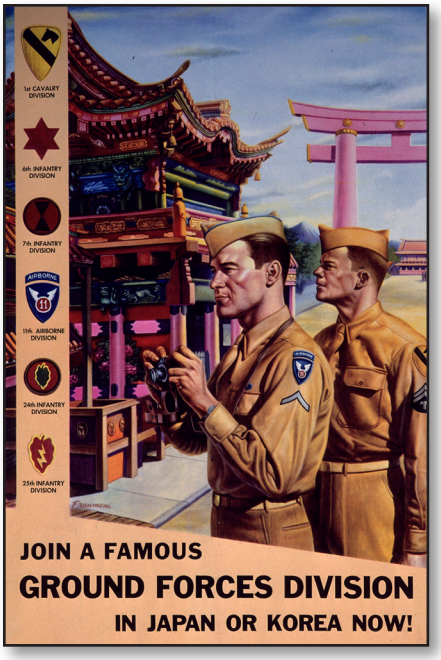
By Thomas Donnelly

In a recent interview with the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, Colin Powell succinctly summarized the attitude of recent U.S. administrations toward North Korea's nuclear program. "We think you're wasting your time, you're wasting your money and…ruining your country…just to have a few nuclear weapons. What's wrong with you?"

In a recent interview with the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, Colin Powell succinctly summarized the attitude of recent U.S. administrations toward North Korea's nuclear program. "We think you're wasting your time, you're wasting your money and…ruining your country…just to have a few nuclear weapons. What's wrong with you?"

To western diplomats, particularly those trained in the arts of "nuclear non-proliferation," Pyongyang's behavior is indeed impenetrable. The Kim regime, now in its third manifestation, is not acting as theory demands, neither in regard to sticks–in the form of sanctions–nor carrots–in the form of aid and opportunities for economic development. As far back as 2000, in the midst of one of the first of many North Korean nuclear "crises," the *Economist* famously put the pompadour-sporting Kim Jong-il on its cover under the headline, "Greetings, earthlings." What *is* wrong with these guys?

The world probably looks very different inside the North Koreans' bunker. They fear two things: their own people, and the modern world as created and sustained by the United States in the post-World War II era. To be sure, Kim Jong-un, like his father and grandfather, worries most



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about his fellow "Norks," both the people as a whole and anyone who might plot a palace coup. But the outside world is menacing and close, just across the 38th Parallel, where the United States boasts a powerful and prosperous puppet in South Korea.

A small nuclear arsenal isn't a very useful tool for suppressing hoi polloi, but it does make the United States, South Korea, and Japan quake in their boots, and even wins a little respect from China. And, in the parts of the world we used to regard as the Axis of Evil, being a key part of the nuclear proliferation network earns not only respect, but hard currency, energy supplies, and technological advances. In other words, as Powell also said, though it would be "suicidal" to use one of its nuclear weapons, nukes make a cheap, effective, and vital deterrent. Two decades ago, it was fashionable in American strategic circles to see Pyongyang at the edge of an abyss, North Korea as a country on the verge of implosion. But even though times have gotten even harder–including a famine that may have killed as much as 10 percent of the population–the Kims carry on.

Western assessments also often consider the North Korean nukes as strategically redundant. Isn't Pyongyang's conventional power–a million-man army and tens of thousands of tube and rocket artillery pieces within range of Seoul–sufficient to keep the RoKs and Uncle Sam from meddling too much? By now, we ought to accept that the North Koreans assess things rather differently.

Pyongyang also has learned from the examples of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan that conventional power and physical distance are not enough. The United States has been prone to "regime change" when it pleases–or gets angry–and despite what other great powers may have thought. Like a child picking the wings off a fly, the Americans toyed with Saddam from 1991 to 2003 before making up their minds to get rid of him. The Taliban was driven out of Kabul and Kandahar within two months of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Absent a nuclear capability, you can never tell what the United States might do.

On the other hand, with a nuclear capability–and by now the North Koreans have parlayed a very slowly progressing and limited program into 20 years of melodrama, brinksmanship, and international diplomatic process–you can think about controlling your own destiny. Life begins with survival, and the Kim dynasty has proven itself to be a durable thing, certainly outperforming the other brands of post-World War II dictatorship.

The Kims are also an example to others, most notably Iran, with whom the North Koreans regularly and globally cooperate. The Iranians are establishing a Tehran Corollary to the Pyongyang Doctrine, and have nearly proven that the determination to acquire a small nuclear arsenal is almost as good as actually having one. They aren't intimidated even by "crippling" sanctions, they've learned how to bamboozle and defy international nuclear inspectors, and they also understand the importance of ballistic missiles as nuclear delivery vehicles. With the United States retreating from the region as fast as it can, the Iranians are reaping the strategic rewards without ever having to cross the nuclear threshold.

This is also undermining the Obama Administration's attempts to establish a non-proliferation rationale for preventing Iran from acquiring a bomb. It's argued that, when the president rejects traditional balance-of-power arguments in favor of a preemptive strike on Iranian nuclear facili-

ties, his no-nukes beliefs will prod him into action. The jury's out on that case, but the facts in evidence thus far suggest that Obama's America is actually easier to deter than it predecessors. The value of a low-cost, small nuclear capability seems to be rising.

The North Korean Kim family may be a little bit crazy, but they're not buffoons. They're not irrational, just–as the therapeutic community might put it–"differently rational." The investments they've made in a crude nuclear capability have repaid huge dividends.

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North Korea's Nuclear Necessity

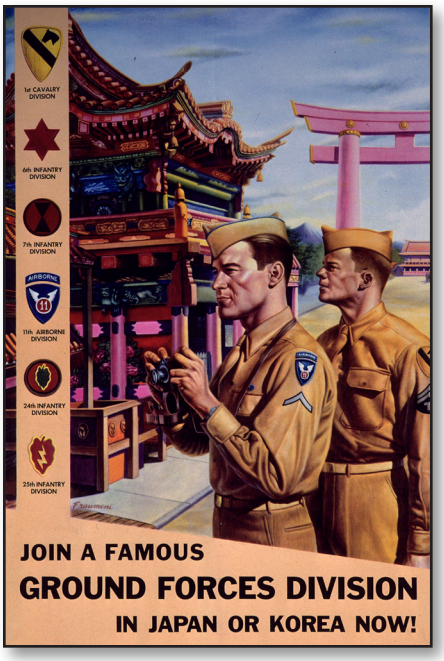
By Walter Russell Mead

North Korea is an unusually horrible state, but its quest for nuclear weapons is not irrational and the gains it hopes to achieve from possessing them make a certain amount of sense. It will not be easy to persuade or compel Pyongyang to give up this program; from a North Korean perspective, the nuclear program is far and away its most successful venture.

The question of security for North Korea is a complicated one. There is a strong xenophobic streak in Korean culture north and south of the DMZ; without a strong and deep sense of national identity it is likely that Korean culture would have disappeared centuries ago. North Korea's leadership doesn't trust anybody, including Beijing. A nuclear deterrent is the ideal weapon for a state that believes that even its allies can't be trusted.

Much of the analysis of North Korea's nuclear program looks at it in relation to Japan, South Korea, and the United States. From that perspective, the weapons program gives the North the security of a nuclear deterrent and the ability to "sell" concessions on its weapons program for badly needed aid and support.

Nuclear weapons are the only crop that Pyongyang has really learned to grow, the only export it can produce in a region where export-led growth strategies have long been the norm. The nuclear industry is, from the regime's point of view, an ideal choice. It is heavily dependent on the state, closely tied to the power structure, and it produces economic as well as security benefits that the current regime could not easily achieve by alternative methods.



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Whether considered economically or politically, the nuclear industry brings substantial benefits to the regime. Fear of Pyongyang's nuclear program gives North Korea leverage over Japan. The program has induced the United States and its allies to make repeated offers of aid and assistance. The nuclear arsenal gives North Korea the power to produce political crises in the region almost at will, and it is an industry that keeps on giving. Each year Pyongyang can demand more aid and support in exchange for entering into talks about its weapons programs, agreeing to slow down production, allowing inspectors to visit new sites, or whatever else happens to be on the western shopping list.

The domestic benefits are also very large. Politics still exist in even the most totalitarian of societies, and the nuclear program provides valuable confirmation of the regime's claims to have transformed North Korea into a leading world power. The nuclear weapons program is seen as concrete evidence that *juche*, the concept of radical self-reliance that is at the core of North Korean ideology, works in the real world. The weapons program, shabby as it is by international standards with failing satellites and low-tech nuclear detonations, is the regime's greatest success. It would be difficult to think of any other program that could achieve results this substantial without in some way threatening the tight grip that the immediate circle around the Kim family holds on this unhappy society.

The North Korean nuclear program keeps hostile states at bay and imposes a sort of tributary status on them, even as it contributes to the consolidation of the regime's control at home. It

provides immense psychological benefits to the rulers, who can measure their power by the fear and caution with which the United States, Japan and Seoul approach Pyongyang. The perceived success of the weapons program in strengthening North Korea's hand abroad becomes a powerful theme in the regime's domestic propaganda.

Chinese and other leaders have sought to wean the North Korean leadership away from this approach by pointing up the benefits of integration into the regional and global economy. China desperately wants North Korea to adopt the economic reforms that helped build modern China. From the point of view of the North Korean leadership, this approach has never seemed particularly attractive. It is hard to speculate on their thought processes from outside, but it would appear that to the Kim family, it is better to own 100 percent of something very small than to own a substantial minority stake in something much larger.

North Korea's nuclear arsenal, small and simple as it is, offers it yet another important benefit: insulation against Chinese pressure. Although Beijing is nominally a North Korean ally, in reality the interests of the two states are distinct. For North Korea, its nuclear program both reduces its dependence on Chinese security guarantees and gives it the ability to make provocative diplomatic moves that can plunge the entire region into crisis. North Korean saber rattling can and does create major headaches for China even as it intensifies Japan's drive toward militarization and periodically drives Seoul closer to Washington and Tokyo. China's repeated failures to control its obstreperous client reduce China's regional prestige and damage its interests. North Korea appears to have learned to use the threat of such incidents to extort greater aid and less conditional support from China.

For North Korea, even a small nuclear arsenal is an effective policy tool. It offers security for the regime at home and abroad, helps consolidate Kim family rule, and keeps both "friends" and enemies at bay. One would not expect such a valuable tool to be negotiated lightly away, and so far the North Koreans have held tightly onto what they presumably believe is the most valuable asset they possess.

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The Dangers of a Failed U.S. Strategy of Containment

By Victor Davis Hanson

Containing North Korean adventurism was always an element of a larger understood American security protocol: the United States would ensure the safety and territorial integrity of our post-war reformist Asian allies–Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan–which in exchange would not become nuclear powers and would not return to the destructive nationalist warring of the 1930s.

The advent of a small nuclear arsenal in North Korea and the ongoing translation of Chinese fiscal power into military growth unfortunately required the U.S. to reemphasize as never before, to both our friends and enemies, that extraordinary commitment. We were obligated to remind the increasingly tense region that a North Korean invasion or missile attack, or a major unilateral Chinese entry into the air space or waters of these four countries, would be met by a proportionate American reaction that would ensure such aggression would prove unwise.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration has not really done that, but instead loudly boasted about negotiations with Russia over reducing deployable nuclear weapons. Russia, of course, no longer has non-nuclear clients that look to it for a nuclear umbrella of security; it certainly is not so relevant to the Pacific as in the past. So the negotiations seem fossilized and pose more of a direct interest to those not involved in them than aimed at making the world a safer place.

Even more unfortunately, such talk about cutbacks in our deployable strategic arsenal coincides with sequestration reductions in the defense budget, and a sort of embarrassing paralysis in the Middle East. From the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf we have issued serial deadlines and redlines, but otherwise mostly watched as Americans perished in Libya and the "liberated"

country turned into something like Somalia. Syria has become the Balkans of the 1990s. Egypt is a mess whose warring sides–Islamists, secular reformers, the military, and Mubarak hold-overs–all unite in sharing a common disgust for the benefactor U.S. Iraq is all but abandoned by the U.S. Iran ignores our nagging pleas to cease uranium enrichment. And the more we brag about al-Qaeda on the run, the more we seem to run from it.

The global fallout is not hard to predict. Over the next few years–if not sooner–either North Korea or China will probably gamble that a regional adventure is worth the risk. And in anticipation of that aggressive mindset, our allies will either make humiliating concessions, or, more likely, take the appropriate steps to become nuclear.

In this regard, a nuclear Japan or South Korea would quickly produce a nuclear arsenal analogous to our own rather than comparable to the unreliable weapons of North Korea. We should not, after all, expect successful states–that have played by the postwar rules, produced wealth and exported valuable products, and are model international citizens–to tolerate missiles flying over their airspace, or suffer periodic existential threats by nuclear powers, without making the necessary adjustments–if they sense that the overwhelming power of the allied U.S. is neither overwhelming nor necessarily allied.

Victor Davis Hanson, the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, is a classicist and an expert on the history of war. He is a syndicated *Tribune Media Services* columnist and a regular contributor to *National Review Online*, as well as many other national and international publications; he has written or edited twenty-three books, including the *New York Times* best seller *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power.* His most recent book is *The Savior Generals: How Five Great Commanders Saved Wars That Were Lost - from Ancient Greece to Iraq* (Bloomsbury 2013). He was awarded a National Humanities Medal by President Bush in 2007 and the Bradley Prize in 2008 and has been a visiting professor at the US Naval Academy, Stanford University, Hillsdale College, and Pepperdine University. Hanson received a PhD in classics from Stanford University in 1980.

North Korea Has What It Wants

By Bruce S. Thornton

North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons exhibits all the bankrupt notions of international diplomacy. The idea that different nations with conflicting and often zero-sum interests can be led to a mutually gratifying accommodation through conferences and treaties has always been dubious. It depends on questionable assumptions, most important being that all nations desire economic development and peaceful coexistence as much as we in the West do, and wants such boons more than other less savory aims such as power, domination, honor, or the privileges of a ruling clique.

The history of North Korea's successful nuclear weapons programs should have exploded all those assumptions. Indeed, even before achieving nuclear capability, the failure of our negotiations and treaties was patent. A few years of history illustrate this process. In 1991, President George Bush Sr. withdrew 100 nuclear weapons from South Korea as part of a deal with Mikhail Gorbachev. A few months later, the South-North Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was signed, under which both countries agreed not to "test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy or use nuclear weapons" or to "possess nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities," as well as accepting mutual inspections. The next year the North signed the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and allowed in inspectors.

Yet in March 1992, the U.S. had to impose sanctions on two companies in the North involved in developing missiles in violation of these signed treaties. In June new sanctions were imposed, and in September the International Atomic Energy Agency found discrepancies in North Korea's initial report on its nuclear program. In February 1993, the IAEA demanded inspections of two nuclear waste sites. The North refused, and the next month threatened to withdraw from the NPT. After talks in New York, at which the U.S. offered the North a light-water nuclear reactor,

the North suspended its withdrawal. Late that year, the CIA estimated that North Korea had separated 12 kilograms of plutonium, enough for two weapons.

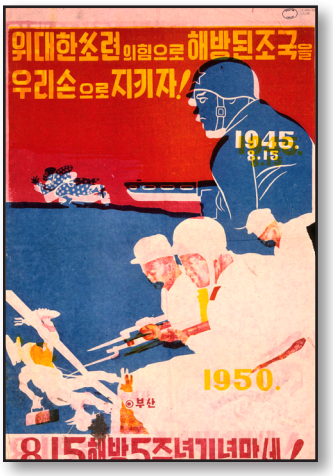
In about two years the pattern of North Korea's defiance and duplicity, and Western appeasement and inaction, had been set. The North would make an announcement promising to let in inspectors in order to head off sanctions, or threaten to withdraw from the NPT to wring concessions from the West, and then would come the revelation that the North had taken yet another clandestine step towards creating a nuclear weapon. Then "bilateral talks" would be announced and conducted, "agreed frameworks" and "moratoriums" signed and touted, promises of suspension of forbidden activities made by the North, and "appropriate compensation"–food aid, South Korea's "sunshine policy" of détente with the North, and "economic normalization"–paid out by the West for such duplicitous North Korean concessions. This process (see this timeline) was repeated until the North had acquired the bomb, and is continuing today as the Kim regime develops nuclear-armed missiles capable of reaching the West Coast, something our intelligence agencies in 2001 estimated could be achieved by 2015.

The cause of this failure does not lie in bad negotiators, or badly written treaties. It arises from the assumption that the North wanted something we could give them, something more valuable than nuclear capability. It failed because we naively believed that non-lethal sanctions, signed agreements, or stern threats never followed up by action would override the game-changing advantages that accrued to North Korea's ruling clique from nuclear weapons. It failed because of what Robert Conquest called the fundamental error of international diplomacy: believing other peoples think as we do, and so are amenable to the same forms of persuasion, or follow the same principles of honesty. It forgot that contracts are validated not by signatures, but by a "meeting of the minds." But we have to be able to imagine minds that have radically different goals from our own.

The sorry history of North Korea's nuclear weapons illustrates the truth expressed by Thomas Hobbes: "Covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." Since 1953, North Korea has been given no reason to fear the American sword. Consequently, a failed state run by kleptocratic thugs dominates the world's attention, compromises our international prestige, and lingers as a potential devastating threat to our security and that of our regional allies. What more could it want?

Bruce S. Thornton is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution. He received his BA in Latin in 1975 and his PhD in comparative literature–Greek, Latin, and English–in 1983, both from the University of California, Los Angeles. Thornton is currently a professor of classics and humanities at California State University in Fresno, California. He is the author of nine books and numerous essays and reviews on Greek culture and civilization and their influence on Western civilization. His latest book, published in March 2011, is titled *The Wages of Appeasement: Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America*.

Suggestions For Further Reading



What exactly are the strategic aims that North Korea hopes to achieve by the possession of a few deployable nuclear weapons?

- Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (Ecco, 2012). First-rate account by a scholar and former White House official.
- Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* [updated edition] (W.W. Norton & Company, 2005). An accessible account by the dean of revisionist historians.
- Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: the Unending Conflict in Korea* (W.W. Norton &Company, 2013.) Highly regarded account, account, scholarly and readable, of the war and its long-term consequences.
- Korea Economic Institute, *Challenges Posed by the DPRK for the Alliance and the Region* (2011). An astute set of analyses.
- David McCann and Barry S. Strauss, *War and Democracy: A Comparative Study of the Korean War and the Peloppnesian War* (M.E. Sharpe, 2001). A provocative set of comparisons taking a very long view.
- The US State Department's page on North Korea is useful. It includes a useful link to the CIA World Factbook page.

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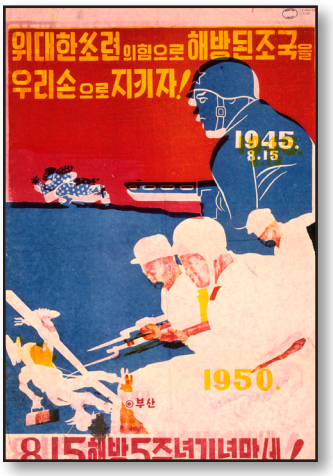
Discussion Questions



What exactly are the strategic aims that North Korea hopes to achieve by the possession of a few deployable nuclear weapons?

1. How many nuclear weapons does North Korea have, and to whom and to what degree do they represent an existential threat?

2. What are China's strategic interests in promoting either aggressive or moderate North Korean behavior?

3. Will the nuclear status quo of Pacific regional powers — China, North Korea, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines — change in the next decade? If so, why?

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