

The North Korean Powder Keg

North Korean Dictator Kim Jung Un has only one card to play in the international arena. The country is essentially bankrupt but for its enormous army and stockpile of conventional weapons. Its nuclear program inches forward to the day when it can fire an ICBM at South Korea, Japan, or the United States. Un is perhaps the most reckless of North Korea's dictators since the end of the Korean War. Since then, the United States and South Korea and the Chinese and North Korea have maintained a hair trigger divide with North Korea never renouncing the state of war and always promising to one day takeover the remainder of the Korean peninsula. Although most North Koreans are destitute, the twenty-five percent inducted in the military are fed and are fiercely loyal to Un. President Trump and Un are now eye to eye, waiting for the other to blink. North Korea is no match for the United States, but history teaches that Un will continue to be provocative and wisdom dictates unconventional means are the best response to Un's provocations. In short, we must aim to isolate and neuter him first and foremost but must be ready, if all else fails and Un launches nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, to annihilate North Korea.

One of the primary difficulties facing the United States in its stand-off with North Korea is our lack of good intelligence concerning just what makes Kim Jung Un tick. He is an odd, quirky, and brash fellow, to be sure, but does his immaturity ultimately lend itself to a fear of being deposed and of annihilation or to delusions of grandeur in which he fantasizes that his ambitions will translate into reality, no matter what. Dictators of comparable ilk, like Adolph Hitler, have frequently underestimated their opponents and have exaggerated their own country's power. Does Un, like Hitler, micromanage military strategy? Does he interfere with the recommendations of his military commanders? Will he control

in detail the use of North Korean forces in battle, such that they will be inflexible in responding to the dynamic array of force that the United States and its allies can marshal?

Having little to go by in comprehending the psyche of Un, we nonetheless do have a good idea of what weapons systems are available to him and of his command, control, and communications. Secretary of Defense Mattis is well situated to discern the weaknesses in those systems.

Although defense of American interests demands that we maintain a high state of readiness for war, the better part of this battle can now be waged to render North Korea increasingly isolated and to sabotage its means for waging war before its outbreak. North Korea is linear in its conventional force. Its unconventional warfare involves activity characteristic of the mob and terrorists (kidnappings, assassination, poisonings, and terrorist acts). We can anticipate that Un will expand its mob type activities against Americans as his conventional forces are checked. He will continue to supply terrorist groups that target Americans with weapons, perhaps even fissile materials for making dirty bombs.

The President is ably served by Secretary of Defense Mattis who is a well-informed and well-educated warrior, very much aware of North Korea's weaknesses and of how best to employ conventional and unconventional means to isolate and neuter Un. The United States has plenty of means short of overt military engagement to achieve its objectives but must be positioned to employ overwhelming and devastating force if Un deploys nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons.

Were this crisis to have arisen during the Obama Presidency (as indeed it did to a somewhat lesser degree), he could be counted upon by Un to recoil from ultimate conflict, enabling Un to succeed in intimidating his neighbors and in advancing his nuclear program to the point of posing a direct threat of

a first strike capability against Japan and the United States. We are fortunate that the crisis has arisen while Trump is President and General Mattis serves as Secretary of Defense. Neither one of them will allow Un the advantage. Neither one is shy about resorting to unconventional warfare to achieve our strategic defense with the least risk to American and allied lives.

Cyberwarfare can disable much of the technology upon which Un depends to launch rockets. Electromagnetic pulse weapons can incapacitate North Korea's old communist, top down command, control, and communications model, making it impossible for him to wage conventional war. We can effectively deny North Korea financial assistance and banking support from most of the world. If we increase our naval presence around the Korean peninsula, we can impose a naval blockade if needed, denying North Korea access to markets for export and import of goods. President Trump has wisely made Chinese constraint of Un's jingoism a condition precedent to more normalized relations with the United States. We can specifically make elimination of Un a top priority in our dealings with China, demanding that the Chinese find a way to remove the dictator and deescalate tensions.

In the last analysis, if Un transforms his rhetoric into action and unleashes nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons on South Korea, Japan, or the United States, we must be sure that he knows and believes that the United States will swiftly move to take him out, to annihilate North Korea, and to obliterate its six million troops, its conventional and unconventional weapons systems, its air and rocket forces, and its nuclear weapons production facilities. He needs to appreciate that his own life will be eliminated promptly if he takes those steps. We need to make sure that the message reaches him through proxies and that he receives it repeatedly. We should redouble our efforts to make sure that all weapon systems needed to achieve that objective are at a

high state of readiness so as to minimize the loss of American and allied lives.

President Trump appreciates that quiet action and unflinching resolve are the best antidote to Un's jingoism. He has wisely elected to avoid telegraphing to Un and the world the precise steps we are taking to repulse Un. It is best that Un feel the effect of the action before he hears of it, keeping him off balance and in a state of constant uncertainty. There is perhaps no better leadership assembled in the United States to confront Un than exists now. It is an apt time for us to end the era of strategic patience.

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