

Trump's China Play

President Trump's recent visit at Mar-a-Lago with Chinese President Xi Jinping continues to bear fruit in our confrontation with North Korea's dictator Kim Jung Un. That visit and President Trump's continuing interaction with China related to the North Korean problem have borne more fruit than eight years of directionless foreign policy by the Obama Administration. Rather than continue the retreat characteristic of Obama's disengagement from international affairs, President Trump has placed pressure on China and North Korea in ways that are causing significant rifts to appear in the Chinese-North Korean relationship.

North Korea is largely dependent on China for survival. The restrictions China has begun to place on North Korea and China's public scolding of that neighboring communist state are having an effect, leading to the first ever direct criticism by North Korea of China and to a not so veiled threat by North Korea of unspecified retaliatory action against China. The rift is greatly to our advantage in destabilizing the Jung Un regime.

Over twenty percent of the male population in North Korea is in military service. While a large part of the civilian population is largely destitute, indeed frequently suffering from starvation, the military has historically been kept from that fate. If Chinese restrictions on trade with North Korea result in losses of essential goods, the North Korean military will be first to experience an unprecedented sense of neglect, a loss of food and essential support from the regime. The regime uses the feeding of its military and a form of bribery for top officers to beget loyal service. The carrot is also accompanied by a stick, the unpredictable threat of execution or indefinite detention and imprisonment for those in the military high command whose actions, inactions, or behavior displease Jung Un.

At the top, North Korea thus depends on brutal dictatorship to keep its military regime from biting back. If the military experiences serious deprivations due to Jung Un's saber rattling, the issue of loyalty will be squarely placed before North Korea's commanders. Will they tolerate the ever-unpredictable Jung Un attendant risk of annihilation if they see a loss of China begetting more widespread starvation and hardship, even for the military? Or, will one or more of the military leaders go rogue and attempt to assassinate Jung Un?

Without question, the approach President Trump is taking, to isolate North Korea and place it in a box wherein it faces a hostile world that cuts off trade while pointing munitions at the ready in the face of Jung Un, is best calculated to destabilize his regime. It is also the best alternative to a leader whose conventional forces are many and whose nuclear weapons program poses a threat to the world.

Without the squeeze, Jung Un will rapidly develop a warhead deliverable anywhere in the world. With it, he may proceed along that path but does so in a state of constant peril and while experiencing the risk of losing China's support entirely. On the political level, the squeeze helps imperil Jung Un's regime. On the economic level, it causes the typical North Korean and, eventually, the military, to lose essential goods and services. On the military level, it ensures that any move by North Korea will face an overwhelming response from the United States and its allies that would take out North Korea's ability to wage offensive war and, likely, take out Jung Un.

Keeping that squeeze in place is the wisest move America can make. President Trump and Secretary of Defense Mattis have proven instrumental in protecting the United States from this rogue regime. We should all recoil from the thought of what predicament the world would be in had Obama's feckless foreign policy remained in place during this crisis. There is no question in the minds of foreign leaders that President Trump

will use American military power to the fullest to arrest aggression fomented by Jung Un. That sure knowledge is our best defense.

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