

# **Dictaploamy: Negotiating With States Like North Korea**

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## **Introduction**

With rogue states, who routinely violate international agreements, support terrorism, and engage in hostile actions toward other countries, Carl von Clausewitz's famous dictum that "War is a continuation of politics by other means," is turned upside down, and should instead read: "Diplomacy is a continuation of war by other means."

The way that regimes like North Korea wield diplomacy as a weapon, rather than as a means to end conflict, can be termed "Dictaploamy."<sup>1</sup> And if the West<sup>2</sup> ever wishes to contain the threat that problematic regimes pose, Western leaders need to understand how those troublesome states use crisis diplomacy, negotiations, and standoffs to further their aims. Only by understanding the nature of these regimes, and the tools they employ to further their aims, can they ever be stopped.

North Korea is one of the most challenging (and high-profile) rogue regimes that the West has to deal with, as not only does it target its neighbors with violence and terrorism, but it also has a nuclear weapons program – multiplying the destruction it can cause.

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<sup>1</sup> A term first used in a July 24, 2009, Forbes column entitled "Dictaploamy," which I authored.

<sup>2</sup> The term "the West," as used in this essay, is not limited to the geographical west, but refers to a mindset, and so includes non-geographically Western states, like South Korea.

## The situation: North Korea

During World War Two the Japanese occupied all of Korea. When they were defeated, the Soviet Union, per agreement with the U.S., accepted the surrender of the Japanese troops north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, and the U.S. accepted their surrender in the south. The division of Korea into two was meant to be temporary, and one election was planned for the entire country, but instead the Soviet Union set up a communist regime in the North under Kim Il Sung (and a pro-Western regime was set up in the South). North Korean propaganda falsely claims that Kim Il Sung liberated the country, when in reality it was the Soviets.

Today the regime is led by Kim Il Sung's son, Kim Jong Il, who took control following the death of his father. Kim, like his father, maintains control through oppression, censorship, and a personality cult. The personality cult extends throughout the Kim family (Kim senior's mother, Kang Ban Suk, for example, is hailed as the "mother of Korea").

Helping the regime subdue and intimidate the population into submission is a network of concentration camps, where it's estimated that more than 200,000 North Koreans are imprisoned<sup>3</sup>. As the North Korean population is approximately 23 million, this means that almost one in every 100 North Koreans is in a concentration camp. Children and grandchildren of people who opposed the leadership at some point are also systematically excluded from positions or responsibility, creating a hierarchy and class structure in the country.

The regime also tries to control the economy, and its mismanagement causes great damages. In the mid-1990s, for example, the mismanagement resulted in the death of an estimated 1 to 2 million people.

Exact figures from North Korea are unknown because the regime is closed off from the rest of the world, earning it the nickname "The Hermit Kingdom." Images and reports from North Korea usually come from tightly controlled events, and Westerners are used to seeing images of goose-stepping soldiers and hand-picked citizens with fixed smiles on their faces adoringly waving North Korea flags.

What we do know about what is happening inside North Korea is therefore limited, and primarily comes from defectors. While it's very hard to leave North Korea – and family members of people who have fled are severely punished – the number of defectors has been rapidly rising. The Economist recently reported that it took more than "half a century for the total number of successful defectors to reach 10,000 people. But in just the past three years, a further 10,000 people have followed."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Great escape: survivors reveal horror of North Korean concentration camps," The Independent, June 2, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> "No Paradise, but better than hell," The Economist, November 18, 2010.

On an international level, North Korea has been involved in international terrorism and regularly engages in war-like actions, particularly toward its neighbor, South Korea. In 1983, for example, a bomb planted by North Korean agents killed four members of the South Korean cabinet, along with 12 other senior South Korean officials, while they were at a wreath-laying ceremony at a mausoleum in Burma<sup>5</sup>. Another infamous attack was the 1987 bombing of Korean Air Flight 858, while it was flying from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok, in which all 115 people on board were killed.

North Korea is also a state with nuclear know-how and weapons – a status it reached in violation of international agreements it had signed. It joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985 (as a non-nuclear state), and left it, in 2003, as a nuclear state. North Korea has also violated other nuclear agreements, including the 1992 North-South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The leader of the regime, Kim Jong Il, is widely perceived to be erratic and irrational, and he is often mocked in the West for everything from his platform shoes and bouffant hairdo, to his obsession with Hollywood films. This reported irrational nature makes the West extra cautious in dealing with him, which works to his advantage.

## **Reaction to North Korean aggression**

On November 23, 2010, North Korea fired artillery shells at Yeonpyeongda, a South Korean island south of the Northern Limit Line in the Yellow Sea (a border that North Korea disputes). South Korean soldiers and civilians were killed, and homes were destroyed. (Naval skirmishes in the same area also occurred in 1999, 2002, and 2009.<sup>6</sup>) South Korea initially responded to the attack by firing shells toward North Korea, following the instructions of President Lee Myung-bak who ordered his military to respond firmly but not to escalate.

The U.S. held joint military exercises with South Korea, but also made it clear that it too doesn't want the situation to escalate. As the New York Times reported at the time: "both countries struggled for the second time this year to keep a North Korean provocation from escalating into war."<sup>7</sup> South Korean civilians were killed by the North Korean military directly, and yet South Korea's prime concern was not to escalate.

This November skirmish followed the March 2010 torpedoing of a South Korean vessel, which killed 46 South Korean sailors onboard. South Korea responded to the attack by labeling the attack a "military provocation," and by promising to be "very prudent in all

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<sup>5</sup> "A Bomb Wreaks Havoc in Rangoon," Time, October 17, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> "Deciphering North Korea's Provocations," Stratfor, November 24, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> "South Koreans and U.S. to Stage a Joint Exercise," New York Times, November 24, 2010.

response measures we take”<sup>8</sup> – making it clear that there wouldn’t be any military response.

North Korea, in response, denied South Korea’s accusations that it was responsible for the attack, and declared that any South Korean response would be viewed as war. (A report by investigators, which included experts from the U.S., U.K, Australia, and Sweden, concluded that North Korea sank the vessel.) After that, little happened to punish North Korea: The West supported a UN resolution, but North Korea’s Chinese and Russian allies ensured that the resolution was sufficiently watered-down that it achieved little practically.

## **Why we do little to punish North Korea: dominant thinking**

Why is there this timidity? If other states acted like North Korea there would be far more serious repercussions. When Libya was found responsible for the killing of U.S. servicemen in a Berlin disco, for example, the U.S. sent fighter jets to bomb Tripoli; when Israel suffered attacks from Hezbollah it sent troops into Lebanon; and when Turkey faced attacks by PKK separatists based inside Iraq, it sent troops into the country.

The international community’s inaction with North Korea comes because it is paralyzed by three types of fear: A fear of a North Korean collapse; China’s fear of a U.S.-allied democratic Korea on its border; and South Korea’s fear of what North Korea can do to it, and especially to its capital, Seoul, in an attack.

### ***General fear of a North Korean collapse:***

The international community is scared of a North Korean collapse because countries worry about its nuclear weapons and know-how falling into the wrong hands. Rogue generals, for example, may try to use the weapons, or (even more likely) sell them to the highest bidder (there is a lucrative market). Because of this fear, the international community prefers the status quo: A threat it’s familiar with – and one that is somewhat contained – as opposed to what could be a chaotic and deadly situation.

A fear that both China and South Korea also are said to have is that a North Korean collapse would lead to a flood of refugees into their countries – a challenge they don’t think they’ll be able to, nor want to, deal with. This is part of the reason (another part will be explained later) why China gives North Korea diplomatic cover and aid.

When this fear is cited, for China, a nation of 1.3 billion, it is exaggerated. Even if the entire North Korean population (23 million) fled into China (which is extremely unlikely) it would be a negligible amount compared to its overall population. We don’t know what North Koreans would do in the event of a collapse, but it is safe to assume that countries like the U.S. and Japan would provide support and try to avoid any mass population movement. (While some rightwing Koreans believe that parts of China

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<sup>8</sup> “South Korea vows caution over ship, North sees war,” Reuters, May 21, 2010.

should be part of Korea, and the flood of refugees may set off revanchism, the chances of them re-conquering territory from China are negligible too.)

South Korea's fear of a North Korea collapse is also the reason for its past "sunshine policy." Introduced after the election of Kim Dae-jung as president in 1997, under the "sunshine policy" South Korea loosened economic restrictions on North Korea and increased economic ties, aid, and contact. The policy, as one Korea watcher put it, was "underpinned by the belief that South Korea would not be able to handle the influx of refugees and possible internal instability that would follow the collapse of North Korea."<sup>9</sup>

***China's fear of a unified Korean peninsula under South Korean-led democratic governance:***

The communist regime in Beijing doesn't want a free, democratic, economically successful, and militarily capable united Korea next door to it, which is likely if North Korea collapses and is reunited with South Korea. China, therefore, prefers an unstable proxy that acts a buffer between it and the U.S.-allied South Korea, and it appears to have both the ability (and willingness) to prop up the North Korean regime economically, and protect it militarily and diplomatically.

While North Korea is viewed by the West as a problem, China sees it differently. Beyond North Korea serving as a buffer between China and the U.S.-allied South Korea, the West's focus on North Korea's misdeeds distracts them from China's international sore spots, like Taiwan and Tibet, its undemocratic nature, and other problematic actions it's accused of conducting (like cyber attacks).

***South Korea's fear of the devastation war would bring:***

In a March 1994 meeting in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea, a North Korean official warned his Southern counterpart that the North would turn Seoul into "a sea of fire" in the event of a war. This is a real threat given the number and proximity of North Korea's arsenal. Seoul is home to about 46% of the South Korea's population<sup>10</sup>, and so naturally this is a great fear for the South. U.S. calculations have predicted in the past that a full-scale war could kill as many as one million people.<sup>11</sup>

This threat hanging over South Korea means it is unlikely to want to engage in war. It has also created, in the words of a veteran diplomat, a type of "Stockholm Syndrome"<sup>12</sup> among South Koreans, leading them to make excuses for the North – when they should be taking a harder line.

South Koreans are (as one Korea-watcher outlined privately), are known to be suspicious of everything their government does and says, stemming from their history (until relatively recently) of authoritarian government. After the South Korea ship was torpedoed, at first barely a majority of South Koreans believed their government's claim that North Korea was responsible. (This attitude, coupled with the type of "Stockholm

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<sup>9</sup> "Meltdown: The Inside Story of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis," by Mike Chinoy. Page 16.

<sup>10</sup> "Deciphering North Korea's Provocations," Stratfor, November 24, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Chinoy: Page 6.

<sup>12</sup> "Stockholm syndrome" is a term in psychology used to describe the phenomenon where hostages develop seemingly irrational positive feelings toward their captors.

Syndrome” and a left-leaning population, makes it difficult for the South Korean government to get support for a tough stance against the North.)

These three fears mean that the nations with a stake in resolving the North Korea problem don't see any non-catastrophic way out of the situation – and so they won't take any action to topple the North Korean regime. As a consequence the West will warn North Korea, and will conduct military tests to try to show that they're “serious” about taking action, but they won't do anything that will ultimately topple the regime. And the problem is that North Korea knows that.

Even the Bush administration – which had a reputation for being tough internationally – kept drawing new red lines that it warned North Korea not to break, but every time that North Korea broke those redlines the Bush administration just drew new ones.

Part of the problem was that President Bush explicitly told North Korea early on that the U.S. would never invade it, declaring in 2002, for example, that: “the United States has no intention of invading North Korea.”<sup>13</sup> This declaration was repeated on a number of occasions, and served to give Pyongyang confidence that its hostile actions would go unpunished.

## **Why these fears are misplaced**

The fundamental problem with this approach is that the international actors are just looking at the situation from their point of view, and seeing their weaknesses and fears – such as the possible attack on South Korea (which is a very legitimate fear) – but they're only looking at half the puzzle.

The other half is North Korea's perspective. In international relations, decisions should not be made just by looking at yourself, but also by looking your adversary – and understanding its strengths, fears, and weaknesses – and then deciding who has the upper-hand and who needs to cower before whom.

International relations, diplomacy, and negotiations can be compared to a very high-stakes game of poker. Based on the cards the West currently holds the far stronger hand, for reasons we will examine. But until now, unfortunately, the West have shown themselves to be the weaker player, allowing North Korea to bluff its way through, winning round after round.

## **Understanding North Korea**

To understand why North Korea acts in the way that it does, it is necessary to examine the regime itself.

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<sup>13</sup> “Joint US-ROK-Japan statement,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, October 26, 2002.

One of the fundamental assumptions made about North Korea is that the regime is irrational and erratic, and that the leader, Kim Jong Il, is the personification of this craziness. While to outsiders how North Korea acts may indeed seem bizarre, a closer look reveals a calculated madness. (Some leaders like to cultivate an image of being irrational, because it works to their benefit – as no one wants to risk provoking them.)

Kim Jong Il is a recluse, and his country's pariah status means that he isn't a regular on the international circuit. China is the main country that he visits – as he has to pay homage to his patron, which provides economic and military aid – but those trips are usually shrouded in secrecy. As such the image of Kim as an irrational leader rarely gets a chance to be challenged.

But on the rare occasions that high-level Westerners do get to meet him, they don't usually describe him as being crazy. In October 2000, for example, U.S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, went to North Korea and met Kim Jong Il. In her memoirs she describes meeting him, and writes: "I found him as somebody who was very well-bred, who did not have to turn to his advisers for answers and somebody that was there as a negotiator."<sup>14</sup>

In a subsequent briefing she gave about the trip to Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov, she reported that: "We had useful and frank discussions, and Chairman Kim struck me someone who is practical, decisive, and seemingly non-ideological."<sup>15</sup>

And respected Korea watchers say the same thing. Scott Snyder (now at the Council on Foreign Relations) writes: "In fact, they are not crazy; they are not even unpredictable. Their use of threats or violence is disorientating to Americans, and highly disturbing. But such behavior has an internal logic and repetitiveness to it."<sup>16</sup>

Now that we understand that the regime is rational, it's next important to understand what motivates it. And that is regime survival and the continuation of the state. As Mike Chinoy, a veteran CNN journalist who spent years reporting on North Korea, put it: Kim Jong Il's "main goal in a strategically realigned post-Cold War world has always been regime survival."<sup>17</sup>

We see this in Kim Jong Il's recent maneuvering to see that his son, Kim Jong-eun, continues the regime that Kim Jong Il's father passed to him: On September 30, Kim Jong-eun's picture was published for the first time by North Korea's media, and on October 10 he took center stage with his father at a military parade.

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<sup>14</sup> "Madame Secretary" by Madeline Albright, 2003. Page 29.

<sup>15</sup> State Department Paper, Talking Point for S/Ivanov Telephone Call, Tuesday October 29, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Snyder, Page ix.

<sup>17</sup> Chinoy, Page xx.

The Economist noted<sup>18</sup> that while “The appearances in Pyongyang seemed partly designed to show that Kim Jong Il, who is 69, remains very much in charge ... the North Korean media did not show what Western hacks clearly saw: the leader holding onto the balcony for support as he walked, left leg clearly limping. After a stroke in 2008, he is believed not to be well.”

Survival has never been assured for North Korea, and the risk it faces is built into the national psyche. The old Korean proverb describes Korea as a “shrimp among whales,” with the whales being Japan, Russia, and China, and historically, to survive, Korea has played the powers against each other. As a result it is used to resorting to trickery and machinations to further its interests.

The North Korean concept of “juche” (which refers to national self-reliance), was first developed by Kim Il-Sung, and is centered on the idea of avoiding reliance on other powers (who will use North Korea to their own advantage).

Beyond this basic insecurity, the way the North Korean regime is set up – as with most dictatorships – is that it needs an external enemy. An external enemy gives the rulers a justification for their harshness, and also providing a scapegoat upon which to blame their problems. As Scott Snyder writes: “North Korea’s domestic political structure and external environment mean that ‘North Korea needs an enemy’ and therefore must use tactics of toughness either to create enemies or to settle disputes without conceding to the positions of their negotiating counterparts.”<sup>19</sup>

North Korea’s perilous economic situation today means that it needs economic aid from the outside – and needs to manufacture a way to get it. In the past it was self-sufficient, and didn’t need this aid, but now it needs tangible results from negotiations. (The famine of the 1990s was so bad that North Korea had to directly appeal for international help, not being able to even wait to get it through negotiations. And in 1997 the situation appeared so bad that the CIA predicted the country would collapse within five years.”<sup>20</sup>)

## **How they negotiate**

North Korea is an expert in using the aforementioned “dictaploamacy” – the method by which rogue regimes carry out their version of diplomacy. I spelled out exactly how dictaploamacy works in a July 24, 2009, article for Forbes, but to summarize:

To distract the West from its rogue activities, and to gain concessions, the regime makes a move sure to provoke an angry response from the West – such as taking an important step forward in its nuclear program. In response to the anger that comes, the

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<sup>18</sup> “Spinning the wrong 'Un,” The Economist, October 14, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Snyder: (Page 102)

<sup>20</sup> Chinoy, Page 9.



regime expresses a commitment to diplomacy to deal with the matter peacefully, offering, for example, to attend talks on the issue.

The international community – always keen to believe in the power of diplomacy and the strategy of placing pressure on the regime worked – embraces the offer, and the process of diplomacy begins. Next the regime – whenever anger about its previous actions has cooled – takes a provocative step designed to increase its leverage, such as kidnapping someone connected to the West under false charges.

After the international community angrily responds – the regime backtracks (and, for example, releases the hostage), and then demands that its “goodwill gesture” is responded to in kind, such as with economic aid (to help with its mismanagement of the economy). The West usually agrees – once again happy that diplomacy is “working” – and as a result, by using dictaploamacy, the regime has not only maintained its initial rogue activities, but has also gained concessions to bolster its rule in the process.

One of the most famous works on understanding how rogue regimes negotiate is “How Communists Negotiate” by Admiral C. Turner Joy<sup>21</sup>, who was the lead negotiator in the (1953 and 1954) Korean armistice talks. Turner Joy describes them as using psychological warfare and delays to wear down their opponents and trying to get maximal concessions – all classic elements of dictaploamacy.

If you look closely at how North Korea negotiates today you can see similar patterns. Those negotiating with the Hermit Kingdom have described a pattern of “drama and catastrophe.” The North Koreans usually start off with hard-line statements to secure as many concessions as possible upfront. At that point, they often show some degree of flexibility during the negotiations before returning to hard line positions at the end to obtain last minute concessions. As they have little to trade away their incentive is to try and obtain “maximal concessions while offering few concessions of their own.”<sup>22</sup>

Diplomats who have negotiated with the North Koreans observe that they’re very bureaucratic and are serious note-takers, and they often refer to past positions if they think they’ve caught their opponent out or sense a weakness. As Snyder puts it: “If North Koreans can identify a weak point in the negotiating counterpart’s position, rarely will they fail to press perceived weakness, contradictions, or divisions.”<sup>23</sup>

The West often doesn’t realize how close attention rogue regimes like North Korea pay to what it does and doesn’t say – and this is costly. On January 12, 1950, for example, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson outlined what he termed America’s “defensive perimeter” in Asia, and didn’t include South Korea in it. Five months later the North

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<sup>21</sup> “How Communists Negotiate” by Admiral C. Turner Joy.

<sup>22</sup> Snyder, Page 22.

<sup>23</sup> Snyder, Page 58.

Korean dictator, Kim Il Sung, launched the invasion of South Korea – and only then did the U.S. realize the significance of Acheson's omission.

Another tactic the North Koreans often use is crisis diplomacy. If they don't like the position they're in, or if there are no negotiations going on and they want to bring their opponents to the table, they'll orchestrate a high-profile incident that will attract international outrage, and then bring people to the negotiating table.

An infamous example of this was in May 1994, when North Korea announced it was unloading fuel rods from a reactor, that the U.S. had previously said would mean a crossing of a red line. The West felt that this standoff could only be diffused at the highest levels, and so former U.S. President Jimmy Carter went to Pyongyang to negotiate<sup>24</sup> -- giving the North Koreans the negotiations they wanted.

## **What to do today**

Kim Jong Il knows the West's weaknesses, and in particular South Korea's. He knows that South Korea intends to avoid a military conflict at any cost, as it has indicated as much in the past. South Korea and the West need to change the way they perceive North Korea, and what they believe effects of a standoff would be, and to understand that Kim Jong Il has even more to lose than they do from a war.

The analogy I like to use for this is from the movie "Crocodile Dundee." When a mugger pulls a small knife on Michael J. "Crocodile" Dundee (known as Mick), his girlfriend, Sue, tells him to give up his wallet to the mugger because "he's got a knife." Mick chuckles and pulls out a bigger knife, and then says: "That's not a knife. This (pointing to the much larger weapon) is a knife." The mugger responds by running off.

A few years ago when Israel was frustrated with Syria's Bashar Assad support for Hamas, Israel sent four fighter planes to buzz Assad's palace – while he was home. It was a reminder to Assad that: "Whatever you do to us; we can do far worse. We know where you live." Assad has many tools to threaten Israel, not least of which his sponsorship of Hezbollah and Hamas, but Israel showed it had a bigger knife – and Assad backed down.

North Korea takes great pride in its military – and has a "military first" doctrine, which prioritizes the military over all other parts of the North Korean government and economy – but it isn't as menacing as North Korea would like the West to think.

While it is a million-man strong, its equipment and forces are outdated, and it will be defeated in a real war with the South – especially a South backed up by the U.S. with 28,000 troops already in the Korean Peninsula (along with overwhelming airpower that

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<sup>24</sup> Snyder, Page 72.

can be rapidly deployed to the region). While it can do serious damage to Seoul, it would most certainly lose a war – and given that the regime’s primary concern is regime survival, it is in fact less likely to seek war.

It’s worth noting as well that still today the U.S. has operational control (OPCON) over South Korea’s military. South Korea was meant to take control in April 2012, but following the recent clashes the U.S. agreed to delay handover until December 1, 2015 – and analysts expect this to be extended even further.

Dictaploamacy didn't work during the Cold War because the U.S. rewarded misbehavior not with promises of more talks but with a willingness to walk away from the table and ratchet up the pressure. Bad behavior was met with a stern response, and not by concessions and the redrawing of red lines. And we’ve seen with North Korea that when countries employ brinkmanship in response to its brinkmanship. Pyongyang backs down.

An example of this was in 1994 when the U.S. negotiator, Tom Hubbard – on an open line that he (rightly) assumed was being bugged – announced his annoyance with progress made to secure the release of U.S. airman Bobby Hall. After “hearing” that, the North Koreans moved with greater speed in the negotiations, and Hubbard achieved the aims he sought.

Another case was in September 2002, when the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, traveled to Pyongyang for a historic summit with North Korea. He undertook the trip after his government had agreed beforehand with North Korea to discuss the (highly emotional) issue of Japanese citizens who had been abducted by North Korea.

But when Prime Minister Koizumi was in North Korea, at first his hosts didn’t mention the abductees, and so the Japanese refused a planned joint lunch. They held an internal discussion – in a room they (correctly) believed that the North Koreans had bugged – and the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe told his Prime Minister that if the North Koreans didn’t mention the abductees, they should all go home.

When they reconvened after lunch, Kim Jong Il reversed course and admitted for the first time that Japanese citizens had been kidnapped, and even apologized for the actions of (what he termed) “misguided people.”

## **Using China**

An important tool we have in dealing with North Korea is China. We recently saw the importance of China’s influence in the machinations that accompanied Kim Jong Il’s efforts to secure regime survival for his son, Kim Jong-eun. This planned leadership transition, as analysts have noted, is likely to impact on Pyongyang’s dealing with other

actors. (Some analysts believe that North Korea's recent attacks were ordered by Kim Jong-eun to shore up his support among the very powerful North Korean military.)

The Economist noted that "Whether North Korea can manage a successful transition depends not only on events inside the country, but also on China, without whose help the North would quickly collapse...Mr Kim's recent visits to China made clear that ...he accepts that friendly ties with the regional giant remain crucial to his country's survival."<sup>25</sup>

While China does have a great incentive to prop up North Korea – to both create a buffer between themselves and a U.S. ally, and distract the West from its own problematic actions – China at the same time also views itself as an important international actor, and so the West should include China as a party to an agreement. This would mean that if North Korea breaks an agreement – it is breaking an agreement with a patron, as well as those nations it perceives as adversaries.

China can also be "encouraged" to pressure North Korea, by signaling to China (and meaning it) that unless it helps, and unless North Korea is restrained, the West will move to topple the regime. According to the U.S. diplomatic cables recently leaked (through Wikileaks) China is growing increasingly frustrated with North Korea and may be open to the idea of a unified Korea.<sup>26</sup> Whether this is accurate (or is just posturing for Western ears) is unclear, but this may encourage South Korea to be bolder. And just as importantly it will be noted by North Korea.

## Conclusion

Almost all reporting and analysis on the recent aggressions by North Korea (the aforementioned shelling of the South Korean island) ignored something the South Koreans did a few days before the clash: On November 18, five days before the November 23 shelling, South Korea's Unification Ministry issued a White Paper declaring that the South's "sunshine policy" was a failure.

According to the paper, the sunshine policy's aim of getting North Korea to change its behavior through economic incentives hadn't worked. This was a signal that any hopes North Korea had of more aid (which it badly needs) would be dashed.

Only a few days after South Korea made this announcement, it was reported that North Korea had given a U.S. scientist access to, as The New York Times reported, a "vast new facility it secretly and rapidly built to enrich uranium." This, the paper opined, confronted "the Obama administration with the prospect that the country is preparing to

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<sup>25</sup> "Next of Kim," The Economist, September 23, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> "China Frustrated With North Korea: Wikileaks," CBC News, November 30, 2010.

expand its nuclear arsenal or build a far more powerful type of atomic bomb.”<sup>27</sup> North Korea took another provocative step and shelled South Korea shortly thereafter.

The timing was of course not a coincidence, rather it was classic brinkmanship to cause South Korea to back down while not giving up on the economic assistance that North Korea badly needs. The advancing of its nuclear program and the military attacks were a sign of weakness, not of strength – unless of course the West falls for the trick, as unfortunately it has too often done.

On December 29, 2010, President Lee Myung-bak called for a dialogue with North Korea, and this call was accepted by North Korea in January 2011. If North Korea has its way, the talks will be about the shelling – and in the meantime its nuclear program will be forgotten. North Korea will also demand a resumption (and an increase) in economic aid, in exchange for it backing down from its nuclear advancement and an end to the controversy over the shelling. All classic dictaploacy on North Korea’s part.

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<sup>27</sup> “North Koreans Unveil New Plant for Nuclear Use,” The New York Times, November 20, 2010