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The U.S. Pushed North Korea to Build Nukes: Yes or No?

By Mike Whitney
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Let's say you know someone who wears funny blue suits and doesn't share your views on politics. So you decide to stick this person in a cage and put him on a diet of bread and water until he agrees to change his wardrobe and adjust his thinking. And when he sits quietly on the cage-floor with his hands folded, you ignore him altogether and deal with other matters. But when he stomps his feet in anger or violently shakes the cage, you throw cold water on him or poke him in the back with a sharp stick.

How long do you think it'll take before your prisoner changes his clothes and comes around to "exceptional" way of seeing things?

It's never going to happen, is it, because your whole approach is wrong. People don't respond positively to hectoring, intimidation and cruelty, in fact, they deeply resent it and fight back. And, yet, this is exactly the way Washington has treated North Korea for the last 64 years. Washington's policy towards the DPRK is not comprised of "carrots and sticks"; it's sticks and bigger sticks. It's entirely based on the assumption that you can persuade people to do what you want them to do through humiliation, intimidation and brute force.

But the policy hasn't worked, has it, because now the North has nuclear weapons, which is precisely the outcome that Washington wanted to avoid. So we don't even have to make the case that US policy is a flop, because the North's nuclear arsenal does that for us. Case closed!

So the question is: What do we do now?

Three things:

First, we have to understand that the current policy failed to achieve what it was supposed to achieve. It was the wrong approach and it produced an outcome that we did not want. We could argue that Washington's belligerence and threats pushed the North to build nukes, but we'll save that for some other time. The main thing is to acknowledge that the policy was wrong.

Second, we have to understand that situation has changed in a fundamental way. North Korea now has nuclear weapons, which means that North Korea is a nuclear weapons state. US policy-makers need to repeat that to themselves and let it sink in. It changes the calculus entirely. When one realizes that the North now has the power to reduce Osaka, Tokyo or Seoul to smoldering rubble with one flip of the switch, that has to be taken seriously. In practical terms, it means the so called "military option" is off the table, it's no longer a viable option. The military option will lead to a nuclear exchange which — by the way— is not the outcome we want.

Third, we need examine the new threats to US national security that have arisen due to our 64 year-long failed policy, and respond accordingly.

What does that mean?

It means that Washington's idiot policy has put us all at risk because the North is fine-tuning its ballistic missile technology so it can hit targets in the US with nuclear weapons. This didn't have to happen, but it is happening and we need to deal with it. Fast.

So what do we do?

We do what every civilized country in the world does; we modify our policy, we turbo-charge our diplomatic efforts, we engage the North in constructive dialogue, we agree to provide generous incentives for the North to suspend or abandon its nuclear weapons programs, and we agree to provide the North with written security guarantees including a treaty that formally ends the war, explicitly states that the US will not launch another aggression against the North, and a strict time-frame for the withdrawal of all US occupation forces and weaponry on the Korean peninsula.

That's what we do. That's how we put an end to this unfortunate and entirely avoidable geopolitical fiasco. We sign a treaty that requires both sides to gradually deescalate, meet certain clearly-articulated benchmarks, and peacefully resolve the long-festering situation through focused and results-oriented negotiation.

And what is the Trump administration doing?

The exact opposite. They've ratcheted up the incendiary rhetoric, put the troops on high alert, moved a carrier strike-group into Korean waters, and threatened to use the military option. After 64 years of failure, they've decided to double-down on the same policy.

Washington is incapable of learning from its mistakes. It keeps stepping on the same rake over and over again.