



North Korean Threat Grossly Overblown

In the midst of an economic crisis and worries over a global epidemic, North Korea's creaky totalitarian state continues to occupy headline news. North Korea, arguably the last Stalinist regime on Earth, has, over the past decade, conducted three long-range missile tests — none of which has come remotely close to demonstrating an ability to reach even western Alaska, much less deliver a payload to the continental United States — and carried out a single, low-yield nuclear test that apparently was only partly successful. Now the North Koreans are threatening more missile and nuclear tests unless the UN Security Council apologizes for tightening sanctions over the latest missile launch.



Against a backdrop of hysterical anti-North Korean rhetoric, two absolutely essential points must be made: (1) North Korea, despite a single feeble nuclear test using material harvested from a single small, relatively inefficient nuclear reactor, poses little threat to the outside world; and (2) North Korea, despicable regime that it is, has been a UN project from the get-go. It is unlikely, absent the UN Security Council and its periodic pronouncements, that such a regime, isolated and hemmed in by hostile powers, could have persisted for so long.

As to the first point, North Korea's conventional military forces are numerically very large — but so were those of Saddam Hussein before the Gulf War. South Korea alone fields a modern military of more than 600,000 (the world's sixth largest), and it, Japan, and the United States all wield state-of-the-art weapons systems that would guarantee that any second Korean War, absent Chinese intervention, would end in the swift and utter defeat of the North Koreans. North Korea has no ability to project conventional military force beyond its own sealed borders except into its South Korean neighbor — an invasion or sustained aerial bombardment of Japan or the United States is an absurd prospect.

As for its nuclear ability, North Korea has managed to detonate a single nuclear device, not a bomb per se. Achieving a nuclear explosion, while difficult enough in itself, is a far cry from producing reliable, deliverable nuclear weapons, especially warheads miniaturized sufficiently to be mounted in a missile cone. For some perspective, consider that India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 — a detonation of a non-weaponized device like North Korea's — but did not test actual nuclear weapons until nearly a quarter century later, in 1998. Even today, more than a decade after those tests, India still lacks many of the components of a modern nuclear arsenal, including submarine-launched missiles, missiles with a range longer than about 3,500 miles, and missiles with multiple, independently targetable warheads (MIRVs). This, despite the fact that India has a huge number of talented engineers and physicists and has been applying a considerable portion of its national resources to nuclear technology for more than 50 years.



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on April 30, 2009

There is always the remote chance that a so-called rogue regime like North Korea could deliver nukes to some terrorist organization but, given the North's demonstrated penchant for national survival, such a suicidal move is extremely unlikely.

The real issue is that, in defiance of all logic, the North Korean government is still with us nearly 60 years after the UN-mandated stalemate that left the Korean peninsula divided and under international military conservatorship. Pyongyang has starved and oppressed its citizenry without a peep of dissent for generations, keeping the "Hermit Kingdom" in near-total isolation from the outside world. It has done this only because the UN-patrolled DMZ (demilitarized zone) between north and south has kept the Korean cold war simmering, and because the West, including the United States, helps to keep the regime afloat with periodic infusions of cash and humanitarian aid.

North Korea, in fine, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the United Nations, to be used as a handy pretext for stronger international controls whenever political opportunity arises. At the moment, momentum is afoot to build what President Barack Obama, in a recent speech in Prague, called a "stronger global regime," that is, an international framework for controlling both the world's existing nuclear arsenals and nuclear power plants.

No one entertains any illusions about ridding the world of nuclear technology and weapons, but what the UN has long aspired to do is monopolize them. This was made clear back in 1961, when the U.S. State Department issued Publication 7277, entitled [Freedom From War](#), that laid out a three-step program for bringing the world's military forces, and especially nukes, under United Nations control. While this goal has so far proven elusive, high-level maneuvering in this direction, in the form of test-ban treaties and other measures designed to hamper further growth of nuclear arsenals, continues apace. With so-called "rogue regimes" like North Korea and Iran refusing to play by the UN's rules, pro-UN internationalists can continue to promote the argument for nuclear disarmament and empowerment of a global nuclear authority.

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