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China's 'Time for Choosing'

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China's latest United Nations veto threat should convince even the most generous diplomat that Beijing is part of the problem in North Korea, not a "partner" in a solution. If it ever hopes to get a solution, Washington should now make Beijing's policy toward North Korea a vital test of China's ability and desire to be a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system. Specifically, the United States should insist on the introduction of the Japanese draft Chapter VII resolution proposing sanctions against North Korea for noncompliance and allow China to use its veto, if it follows through on its threat. Forcing a veto would clear the air and reset the issue for policy-makers and diplomats. Though some would claim a Chinese veto to be a "defeat" of U.S. policy, it would actually be a sign of Chinese obstruction of an international consensus. Regardless, it would end the charade that China has played a "constructive role" in preserving the existing international nonproliferation structure.

"Maintaining Peace and Stability"?

North Korea celebrated July 4th with the unannounced launches of seven short-, medium-, and long-range ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan. These were just the latest example of Pyongyang's recklessness and underscored the urgency of denuclearizing the regime.

Recognizing that the only potentially successful diplomatic method of controlling Pyongyang is through the united, multilateral approach, on July

6 President George W. Bush asked several world leaders, including Chinese President Hu Jintao, for their help in fashioning a tough, consistent international position committed to restraining North Korea. Mr. Bush, apparently trying to cajole cooperation, told his Chinese counterpart, "We appreciate all the efforts China has exerted for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula."¹

In reply, President Hu reportedly declared he would immediately send China's top Asia specialist, vice foreign minister Wu Dawei, to Pyongyang to accompany a Chinese delegation there to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the China-North Korea military alliance. Observers said China was obviously "irritated" with its North Korean allies. The United States, in turn, sent its top North Korea negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, to Beijing for consultations with the Chinese foreign ministry.

But when the Chinese delegation wrapped up its trip to Pyongyang, there was little evidence of China's supposed irritation. Instead, the Chinese delegation lauded North Korea's economic development, promised closer ties, and praised North

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Korea's efforts to "maintain peace and stability." The Chinese foreign ministry asserted to foreign reporters that "China and North Korea are friendly neighbors." Moreover, before he departed for North Korea, Wu Dawei told a visiting Japanese politician that U.S. financial sanctions on North Korea (put in place as punishment for counterfeiting U.S. currency), were the "major factor in the decision to test-fire seven missiles."² In other words, it's America's fault.

Washington should not have been surprised, then, when President Hu sent a telegram to North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il reaffirming the Pyongyang delegation's statements:

Over the last 45 years both China and the DPRK have jointly accelerated the cause of socialist construction and *defended the peace and stability of the region*, respecting and supporting each other and closely cooperating with each other on the principle and spirit of the treaty.³ (emphasis added)

That message, and the stark absence of any hint of disapproval in Beijing's tone much less its actual rhetoric, was surely a slap in the face U.S. policy.

Chinese Veto Threat

And then the Chinese slapped the U.S. a few more times. On Wednesday, July 12, in Beijing, President Hu met with a North Korean counterpart to celebrate the 45th Anniversary of the Chinese-

North Korean alliance. In careful language calibrated to be anodyne to North Korea and give an impression of Chinese concern, President Hu repeated, "We are against any actions that will aggravate the situation. We hope that relevant parties will do more things conducive to the peace and stability of the peninsula."

The same day, China's United Nations ambassador, Wang Guangya, told reporters in New York that if the Japanese draft resolution for tightly focused sanctions were to be put to a vote "without any modifications, the instructions [for] me is to veto it."⁴

In this, China objects more to the United States and Japan's measured response to North Korea's provocative behavior than it has to the behavior itself. Further, a veto threat is strong stuff. In the 34 years that Beijing has occupied its Security Council seat, it has vetoed Council resolutions only four times.⁵

What is it that Mr. Wang's government finds so objectionable? The Japanese draft "condemns" North Korea's missile tests and places a binding international ban on supplying North Korea with any material or technology relevant to its ballistic missile or nuclear weapons programs. Besides China, the measure has broad support. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John R. Bolton declared, "We are very pleased with this draft," and it is also supported by European members of the Security Council.

1. "Hu Jintao Zhuxi tong Bushi Zongtong tong dianhua" [Chairman Hu Jintao in telephone call with President Bush], Xinhua News Agency, April 7, 2006, at http://www.chinamil.com.cn/site1/zbxl/2006-07/07/content_519851.htm. The White House did not report the content of the call. In a July 7 press conference, President Bush said "a good partner to have at the table with us is China." See "Press Conference by the President, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, Illinois" July 7, 2006, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060707-1.html>.
2. "China Steps In: Wu plans North Korea visit," Tokyo, Asahi Shimbun, July 7, 2006, at <http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200607070229.html>.
3. Emphasis added. See "Greetings from Chinese Party and State Leaders," Korean Central News Agency, July 10, 2006, at <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2006/200607/news07/11.htm#2>.
4. Colum Lynch, "China to Block Vote Condemning N. Korea; Competing Text on Missile Tests Offered," *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2006, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/12/AR2006071200250.html>.
5. Two of the vetoes came in 1972: one to support its ally Pakistan in blocking breakaway Bangladesh's UN membership application and one, with Russia, against a resolution on the Middle East because it made a negative, albeit oblique, reference to the Black September terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics that China felt was unfair to the Palestinians. The other two vetoes came in 1999, against the extension of the mandate of United Nations Preventive Deployment Force in Macedonia, and in 1997, blocking the sending of 155 UN observers to Guatemala to verify a cease-fire. These latter vetoes were exercised because the countries in question maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

China's Draft

But Ambassador Wang promises that China will veto the resolution without major “modifications.” First, the Chinese draft would urge “all relevant parties” immediately to return to the Six-Party talks, despite that the talks are about North Korea’s nuclear weapons, not its conventional missiles.⁶ The Chinese draft would “regret” (*yihan*, but emphatically not *qianze*, “deplore”) North Korea’s missile tests, implying China’s “regret” that North Korea was *forced* into this unhappy situation by overwhelming circumstances. It further urges “all sides” to employ restraint and self-control and avoid anything that might further exacerbate the situation. Contrary to some press reports, the public Chinese draft contains no provision that suggests Pyongyang must reaffirm its 1999 moratorium on ballistic missile tests.

Second, China demands that the resolution cannot be under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which mandates “action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.” At most, China might permit a vote on a Chapter VI resolution (that demands “the pacific settlement of disputes”), which would treat the missile firings as if they were strictly a problem between the U.S., its ally Japan, and North Korea. And if successful in getting a Chapter VI resolution, China would still, at most, abstain.

What China appears to really want is a non-binding “press release” from the Security Council president that would be as vague as possible about apportioning blame for North Korea’s behavior. Ideally, this press release would allude to North Korea’s “reasonable concerns” for its security in the face of a threat from America. As precedent, Wang referred to an obscure UN action in 1999 in which a press release was issued but not made part of the official UN record.⁷

A separate Chinese-Russian counter-draft circulated on July 13 reportedly “deplores” (better than “regrets”) North Korea’s July 4 missile tests but, in the main, merely suggests that Pyongyang not shoot off long-range missiles again. It also suggests that UN member states might “exercise vigilance” in the choice of goods, technology and materials they export to North Korea’s missile program.⁸

China, for its part, seems intent on exercising little vigilance. Reportedly, ten Iranian missile engineers transited Beijing last month *en route* to Pyongyang, where they intended to check the quality of certain Chinese-made components in the North Korean missiles Iran plans to purchase. If China is abetting the sale of North Korean missile components to Iran, then it has no plans to exercise much “vigilance” at all.⁹

Obviously, China doesn’t want to pressure North Korea. Indeed, one leading Chinese scholar, Chu Shulong of Tsinghua University, admitted, “China can do a lot to North Korea, but China does

6. The Chinese Communist Party’s official organ, the *People’s Daily*, reported at least some portions of the Chinese draft. See Liu Libin, Wang Xiangjiang. “*Jiu chao xian shi she dao dan wen ti zhong guo xiang an li hui san fa zhu xi sheng ming cai an an li hui tui chi biao jue she chao jue yi cao an*,” [Regarding the North Korean Missile Issue; China tables draft Security Council Presidential Statement Draft; Security Council to postpone vote on draft resolution involving North Korea], *Renmin Ribao*, July 12, 2006, p. 3, at http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2006-07/12/node_15.htm.
7. Wang Guangya asserted disingenuously, “[T]his is not the first time the Security Council takes action on this particular issue, because we had a precedence in 1999 [sic]. So if all council members feel that some appropriate action is needed by the council, then we will see.” In fact, China objected to UN Security Council discussion of North Korea’s August 1998 missile firings and blocked the Security Council from permitting a Presidential Statement. China apparently agreed to the issuance of a press release that announced there was a discussion, but the press release was not made a part of the official record. See “*Taepodong Hassha nara Anpori ni Mondaiteiki Nichi-Bei Kokuren Taishi ga Kaidan*” [If North Korea launches a Taepodong, the issue will be discussed in the UN Security Council, in the UN, Japan and U.S. Ambassadors confer], Tokyo, Sankei Shinbun, June 20, 2006, at <http://www.sankei.co.jp/news/060620/kok042.htm>.
8. Judy Aita, “New Draft Resolution on North Korea Not Strong Enough, U.S. Says Russian-Chinese draft does not call missile program threat to peace, stability,” U.S. Department of State, *Washington File*, July 13, 2006, at <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&xy=2006&rm=July&x=20060713121445eafas0.3541681>.

not have a strong interest to do so.” He continued “It’s a problem between North Korea and the U.S., and China’s role can only be limited.”¹⁰ Beijing clearly acts as if nuclear weapons and long range ballistic missiles controlled by the world’s most ruthless is not China’s problem but only America’s.

Force a Chinese Veto

The history of UN action on North Korea is a history of Chinese obfuscation, obstruction, and opposition. When it comes to North Korea, there is no “lowest common denominator” that can serve as a basis for disarming its nuclear and missile ambitions. So long China is unwilling to be part of the solution, there will be no solution.

There should be no further compromise on North Korea’s recklessness or China’s immovable toleration of it. The United States, Japan, and Europe should insist on the introduction of the Jap-

anese draft Chapter VII resolution proposing sanctions against North Korea. If China decides to use its veto, so be it. Once China proves itself to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution, American diplomacy can focus on China, and not just North Korea. A public diplomacy campaign that paints China as the problem would make it easier for the United States to use its full economic, political, diplomatic leverage on China in Congress, in the media, and with the American public. Simply put, China must be made to choose whether it wants to continue as the enabler of the world’s rogue states or to become a “responsible stakeholder” in a stable international system.

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9. Takashi Arimoto, “Iran no Misairu gijutsusha houchou; tepodon hassha junbi sanku ka” [Iran Missile Engineers Visit North Korea, Observe Launch Preparations for Taepodong Missile], *Tokyo Sankei Shinbun*, June 30, 2006, at <http://www.iza.ne.jp/news/newsarticle/world/america/8202/>.
10. Chris Buckley, “China flies into North Korean storm,” Reuters, July 10, 2006.