

## Barack H. Obama's Legacy, Part 12

Edward D. Duvall  
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It would be easy to criticize Mr. Obama for his policy toward North Korea, but it would be likewise unfair. His policy was to do the best he could to ignore Mr. Kim Jong-Un, the North Korean dictator, and not attempt to "negotiate" (which is to say, pay him off), as did Mr. Bush and Mr. Clinton. Mr. Obama's administration referred to his policy as "strategic patience", which means to take a wait-and-see attitude on Mr. Kim's actions, while attempting to use diplomatic means to influence China to in turn influence Mr. Kim. As expected, as Mr. Bush and Mr. Clinton both found out, North Korea's ultimate objective is to develop a credible nuclear force which (they claim) is only to serve as a deterrent to any invasion by the U. S. or South Korea. They continued to develop nuclear arms, and set off several nuclear tests in 2013, despite diplomatic pressure from the Obama administration. (They did so even in the face of an actual United Nation press conference during which the U. N. issued three formal harrumphs! Mr. Kim is playing with fire now). Whether Mr. Kim has intentions of conquering South Korea are not known, but it is reasonable to assume he will try to use his nuclear leverage to do so. Mr. Obama either failed to realize or failed to accept the notion that Mr. Kim is not an independent actor. Because the Stalinist economy of North Korea operates at a bare subsistence level, it is necessary for Mr. Kim to arrange for support from elsewhere, namely Communist China. China provides a great deal of military materiel, technical expertise, and food to North Korea.

Mr. Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, (in essence, dictator of China) is likely in complete control of Mr. Kim. Mr. Xi had throughout the Obama administration resisted repeated calls for tighter sanctions or other measures to rein in North Korea's nuclear ambitions on the grounds that he did not want to provoke a revolution in North Korea that would lead to many refugees crossing the border into China. It is a patently absurd notion. First, China certainly has the means to prevent all crossing of the Yalu River separating the two nations. Secondly, with a population of 1.3 billion, it is hard to see how a few million more from North Korea would make any material difference; and besides, they are already trained slaves, easy to incorporate into China's economy. Third, there will never be a revolution in North Korea unless Mr. Xi orders it. He will not order it so long as Mr. Kim remains his loyal puppet. When Mr. Xi says 'jump', Mr. Kim asks "How high, what color, and how else can I serve you, Mr. Xi, my lord and master?" One phone call from Mr. Xi and Mr. Kim, his family, and his regime will disappear from history. North Korea is allowed to exist because China finds it useful to have a client state capable of unnerving the U. S. and its Asian allies (South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and sometimes New Zealand). While North Korea's antics keep the West off-balance, and unable to develop a coherent strategy against Eastern Asia, China does what it pleases elsewhere, especially in the oilfields of the Middle East and Africa. Lastly, North Korea serves as a buffer state between China and South Korea. Communist regimes have absolute power but also absolute paranoia. Communist China needs a buffer state (like North Korea) to separate their nation from South Korea lest any notion of freedom leak over the border into China.

In the long run, there are three outcomes regarding North Korea. The first is that China desires North Korea to conquer South Korea, thus drawing the U. S. into an Asian land war. This attractive to China only if North Korea could do so quickly while not inflicting any casualties on U. S. forces in South Korea. If the U. S. forces were to become trapped, they are handy bargaining tools by which China could promote an arbitration by the U. N., in which China gets whatever it wants, and China is seen as a peacemaker. Secondly, China may be using North Korea's antics as a means to drive a wedge between the U. S. and its Asian allies, leading the U. S. to abandon South Korea and turn away from Asia in general. That would allow China to become the dominant and uncontested power in the Southern Hemisphere. A third possibility is that China allows North Korea to attack the U. S. directly, to which the U. S. will respond

accordingly, and China will remain neutral. This is highly unlikely, as it would put America at China's doorstep, and would likely result in the U. S. turning Japan into a nuclear power, the situation the Chinese probably fear the most. In the long run, our main adversary is China, not North Korea. Because it is too soon to tell what China actually wants, Mr. Obama's policy of wait-and-see was probably correct. I would say however, that Mr. Obama's failure to identify the real culprit did not help our cause.