

In East Asia, the U.S. faces two foreign policy challenges that seem separate and dangerous, when they are really interrelated in a way so that one problem can be manipulated to solve the other problem. To illustrate, consider the two main challenges the U.S. faces in the region. First, China seems intent on expanding its borders, which has led them into territorial disputes with the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Malaysia. Most provocatively, in areas close to the Philippines, China has constructed man-made islands that serve as military airbases. Further, China has slowly reduced Hong Kong's level of autonomy, most likely with the goal of eventually being able to treat the city as it does any other major Chinese city — that is, without the special set of rules and allowances that Hong Kong has enjoyed since Great Britain returned the city to China. China also claims that Taiwan is really part of China, and not a separate country, and some fear that one day China may try to enforce its claim. In short, China's desire to expand its territory places U.S. allies and trading partners in harm's way.

North Korea presents the U.S. with a second challenge. This country is on the way to becoming a nuclear power. It has recently tested missiles capable of delivering bombs great distances. Kim Jung-un, who rules the country, comes across as an unstable personality, who is willing to use weapons of mass destruction. So far, the U.S. has hoped it could convince China to exert enough pressure on North Korea to get the country to give up its nuclear program. This approach has been a dismal failure. China is reluctant to rein in North Korea because it views North Korea as an ally as it competes with the U.S. for influence in the region. Since China gains nothing from exerting pressure on North Korea, it is unrealistic for the U.S. to continue to ask China to do so.

Instead, the U.S. should harness China's desire to expand territorially to solve the problem of the North Korean rogue state. The U.S. should let it be known that China can annex North Korea without any U.S. resistance. If North Korea were ruled by China, the threat of a nuclear strike from North Korea would vanish and we would only have to worry about the Chinese nuclear weapons, which is already an issue that we have to deal with anyway.

World history is full of examples of large nation states conquering unruly small nations and then going on to keep the peace. The Austrian Hungarian Empire pacified the often-unstable Balkans for hundreds of years. The Ottoman Empire pacified the Middle East for an extended period of time – as history shows this region can be volatile. If China were to rule North Korea, we would no longer face an unstable leader who has nuclear bombs.

Of course, my proposal has some obstacles. Russia would not be in favor of a larger China. In addition, China would have to take over North Korea in a manner that prevents it from using the 10 to 20 nuclear weapons that we believe it has. Therefore, you should consider this column only as a general proposal to get people to think about this issue in a different way, not as a plan that can be implemented without modification.

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