



## TALKING POINTS

Asan Plenum 2013: "New World Disorder"  
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**RELEASE EMBARGO DATE: APR. 30, 2013 AT 9 AM**

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**Panel:** Nuclear Northeast Asia (Grand Ballroom I )

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 14:00-15:15

**Talking Points for:** Richard Weitz, Director and Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

More so than the Middle East crises, the situation on the Korean Peninsula has an explosive potential to escalate into war, perhaps a nuclear one. Even a continuation of the present situation presents North Korea's neighbors with serious security, diplomatic, and even economic challenges, with some foreign investors likely soon to begin seeking safer climates.

It is true that North Korea has committed all these outrageous acts before--issuing wild threats, engaging in provocative military exercises, testing missiles and atomic bombs. And then the cycle of threats and tensions die down. But this time the context is different in several important respects.

First, North Korea has demonstrated a capacity to launch long-range missiles and detonate nuclear devices. In the past, we could dismiss its threats as empty bluster. But now no one knows for certain what capabilities North Korea has, with the U.S. military worried in particular about the DPRK's possible possession of a long-range mobile missile that can evade U.S. Intelligence and strike the U.S. Homeland.

Second, South Korea has adopted a much sterner stand. Whereas in 2010 the South Korean government sought UN sanctions after the North sunk one of its warships and again after it shelled one of its border islands, the ROK has now pledged to retaliate militarily for any DPRK first use of force.

Third, we have new political leaders in China, Japan, South Korea, and North Korea. The new leaders have no experience playing this type of escalation game, so they could easily miscalculate, as happened in 1950. Nobody in Washington expected North Korea to invade

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the South that summer, while the leaders in Pyongyang and Moscow were caught by surprise when the United States then intervened to defeat the invasion, even after U.S. diplomats had declared the Korean Peninsula outside the U.S. defensive perimeter in the Asia-Pacific region. Since then, the DPRK has repeatedly caught the United States and other countries off-guard by its bizarre but bold actions.

Finally, the DPRK-Iran nexus is weighing more heavily on US policy makers. There is considerable evidence that the two countries cooperate in developing missile technologies, so much so that we would be wise to treat their joint efforts as a single missile research and development program. Fears have increased that Pyongyang might share with Tehran its insights into developing nuclear warheads, allowing Iran to have a demonstrated nuclear weapons capability without actually testing a bomb.

Even beyond direct cooperation between the two countries, policy makers in Washington and elsewhere worry that Iran’s government is learning the unhelpful lesson that US nonproliferation red lines can be ignored with impunity. Iranian leaders hardened their line at the most recent nuclear negotiations in Kazakhstan and are now hinting that they might follow North Korea and simply withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty if the West does not provide some urgent sanctions relief. Even after the current crisis ends, the DPRK proliferation problem will persist.

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