

South Korean President affirms Loyalty to the U.S., Blames China for North Korea

By [Stuart Smallwood](#)

Region: [Asia](#)

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South Korean President Park Geun-hye made her first visit to the Washington [imperial court](#) last week, what is always a moment of great prestige for the junior ally-state [still under wartime control](#) of the United States sixty years after the Korean War. During the trip, and fitting her subaltern position, President Park signaled her intention to maintain a posture toward China's relationship with North Korea that will please Washington, but remain completely ineffectual.

Speaking to the [Washington Post on May 8](#), Park willingly played the "[blame China](#)" card, arguing it "can do more" to force North Korea to change.

"In order for...the Korean Peninsula to enjoy greater peace, North Korea needs to choose the right path, and China should exert greater influence in inducing North Korea to do so," she said after meeting President Barack Obama.

The "right path" includes, presumably, North Korea renouncing its policy of [nuclear deterrence](#) and giving up its small arsenal of [questionably operable](#) atomic weapons before any kind of negotiations with the U.S. can begin. Of course, the "right path" might refer to human rights as well, but, though President Park may care (as former first lady of and [apologist](#) for her father's authoritarian government it is hard to say), it would be naive to assume her superiors in Washington are truly concerned about conditions within the North. The U.S. is, after all, responsible for the most grave international war and human rights crimes of any nation currently existing (see [Afghanistan](#), [Iraq](#), [torture](#), [drones](#), the [drug war](#), and so on).

Notions of "right" or "wrong" paths aside, it seems reasonable to assume North Korea is unlikely to give its nuclear weapons up — even if it has sincere incentive (in the form of a Washington peace treaty, among other benefits) to do so. If the North Korea government wasn't already determined to keep their nukes, the fate of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya [showed North Korea's leadership](#) that having even the appearance of a nuclear deterrent may be the difference between finding one's head on a spike and [living it up](#) in Pyongyang.

Both the U.S. government and President Park must know this. So, in order to explain the failure of Washington's impossibly effective "no nukes, no relations" policy — something that relies on sanctions to try to put the pinch on the North Korean government but only causes [greater suffering](#) for regular North Koreans — the U.S. needs to [blame China](#).

China, they argue keeps undermining sanctions by providing North Korea with goods, fuel and, worse, materials used for developing armaments. This props up a regime [that would otherwise collapse](#), not into the chaos of military factional conflict and a refugee crisis that

would negatively affect the region, but a docile entity that would slowly be pulled into South Korea's (and Washington's) nurturing orbit. No doubt with visions of such a fairytale scenario in her head, President Park told the Post, "North Korea is very heavily dependent on China."

The narrative that North Korea would collapse without China is probably true given how [inept](#) North Korea is economically. Yet two questions emerge: the first regards just how much control China actually has over the "hermit kingdom." The second regards China's motive (or lack of) for being more cooperative with what is essentially an American policy of waiting (and hoping) for the Pyongyang government to collapse (this has been a [mostly-ongoing](#) policy of the U.S since the end of the Cold War).

China has traditionally been unwilling to follow the dictates of the U.S. regarding economic relations with and financial support for North Korea in the past. For China threat theorists this is supposedly proof that China is a supporter of global authoritarianism and bent on [rolling back](#) the "liberal order" (an argument conveniently ignoring that America is the [role model](#) for such behaviour). However, China has been more accommodating recently. China has [signed on](#) to U.N. sanction measures drawn up by the U.S. this March after North Korea's rocket launch last December and their nuclear test this February. They have also [cut off](#) transactions with North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank. However, [economic ties](#) with the North are still permitted and there is no indication China's [port development](#) in that region and mining operations throughout the country have been suspended.

Short of completely disrupting the increasing economic relationship between the two countries — something inconceivable because it would be against China's economic interests — it is hard to know what else the U.S. and President Park expect from China. Park suggested in the interview with the Post that China could attempt to be a role model for North Korean economic reform, but China has been trying to steer North Korea in this direction for years to no avail (Park also ignores that it would be impossible for North Korea to follow the "China model" if North Korea can't trade with the outside world due to sanctions).

China's recent turnabout and nominal support for sanctions and [verbal rhetoric against North Korean nukes](#) is likely an expression of annoyance that North Korea, with its bombastic rhetoric and weapons testing, continues to provide the pretext for America's increased military presence in the region. This includes the continued development of theater missile defense, an American policy that [feeds](#) the nuclear arms race in the region and stokes greater tension. China's cooperation may be an easy concession for a Chinese leadership that is, at least partly due to [domestic political reasons](#), compelled to take a hard-line stance on territorial disputes with Japan and in the South China Sea.

At any rate, this cooperation is superficial and will remain so. China may well be fundamentally against North Korea as a nuclear state, as it says it is, because this may encourage Japan to develop nukes at some point in the future. But they aren't opposed enough to cut off the North Korean government entirely. This is entirely justified; a North Korean collapse would be a nightmare scenario for their country.

If the North Korean government were to fall, an internal flood of refugees may merely be the beginning of the unintended consequences resulting from America's coercive regime change policy. There are any number of possible scenarios including factional conflict in North Korea between members of the vast North Korean military structure and a lashing out

by the North in a fit of desperation that that could turn the fantasy of a soft fall into yet another cautionary tail for imperialist pursuits of regime change.

Further, given America's obvious policy of [maintaining military hegemony](#) in the region and solidifying alliances directed squarely at China, it is hard to understand why China would feel compelled to listen to Park Geun Hye (a leader of a state within that opposing alliance) or anybody else connected with the United States on issues related to power balance in the region.

Park Geun-hye's comments make little sense. They should be viewed as nothing more than an [expression of solidarity](#) with the United States and an attempt to scape goat China for the ineffectiveness of the American regime-change policy supported by her own political party since the end of the Cold War. They are an indication of how South Korea's alliance with the U.S. forces it to pursue unworkable foreign policies that are detrimental to long-term prospects for peace in the region and on the Korean Peninsula.

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