

Countries must team up to tame North Korea

THE ISSUE | Dealing with North Korea.

OUR OPINION | China, Russia and other countries must join the U.S. in pressuring North Korea to curtail its nuclear buildup.

Fear is ratcheting up on the Korean peninsula, where 23,000 U.S. troops are sitting on the edge of what could become the newest international crisis.

The recent parade of beligerent acts by North Korea – its test of a nuclear bomb May 25, followed by test launches of short- and medium-range missiles, a new proclamation from the north that it intends to ignore the longstanding Korean War armistice, and the looming threat of more missile launches – reminds us that the Cold War’s problems are still with us.

But it’s also abundantly clear there are no easy ways to respond and tamp down the situation. A military attack by the United States should remain out of consideration unless an attack is launched on South Korea or Japan, though recent reports suggest we’re showing the flag and taking some small but visible steps to let Pyongyang know we’re able to defend our allies.

However, North Korea has a million-man army, and leader Kim Jong Il is unpredictable enough already without having his finger on the button during open hostilities. The regime may not have perfected the miniaturization technology needed to put warheads on their missiles and directly threaten their neighbors, but there’s no guarantee they wouldn’t use their nukes any other way they could.

So we’re left with sanctions, external pressure and diplomacy, none of which should be mistaken for weakness. The trick is finding the right combination of those three, which will by necessity require the United States to put its faith in others.

Though some sanctions have been in place for years, not all of them have been enforced. The current push under way at the United Nations Security Council seems to include at least enforcing the existing rules, which were designed to put the squeeze on the north’s elite and prevent new military hardware and components from being shipped there. The U.S. is also consid-

ering pressing for new restrictions aimed at choking off shipments to companies inside North Korea that are tied to their nuclear ambitions.

The U.N. should hesitate on neither step. The end goal for every power in the region needs to be halting the growth of the north’s nuclear program, particularly given its past history of contacts with less-than-friendly powers, including Syria.

In order to get this done, we need the cooperation of China and Russia, both of which have been slow in the past to criticize Kim & Co. or resort to a heavy hand to thwart his nuclear ambitions. That’s reportedly changed now, with Russia finally awakening to the threat it faces to its east. Likewise, China has been as close to an ally as Pyongyang can claim, but now even elements of Chinese leadership are allegedly souring as the north becomes more difficult and threatening.

In addition to backing us at the U.N., these two nations can threaten to shut off their flow of oil and other aid on their own, or at least use that power as a club to drive Kim’s negotiators back to the table for multiparty talks. That ought to be a no-brainer for them: They don’t want a crippled or collapsing north or a reunified Korea on their border – worries that have caused them to blunt their responses in the past – but they don’t want a warlike, chest-thumping dictatorship willing to pick a fight, either. On top of that, a China that gets an awful lot of American business should be confident of where our interests lie, and just how much they intersect here with theirs.

These are delicate maneuvers, to be sure, and require continued, firm diplomatic pressure and the support of the world community. Washington’s response – taking nothing for granted, keeping the pressure on while giving diplomacy a chance to work and quietly preparing in case of any escalation – has been rightfully measured, to date. May the peace hold and the situation cool off.

That was the essence of his pitch to the world: to reject a history of subjugating one another in pursuit of self-interest and squarely face the conflicts that have grown from that history. The issues he ticked off are daunting: Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nuclear weapons, democracy, religious freedom, women’s rights and economic opportunity.

By acknowledging the complicity of both the United States and the Muslim world in the problems that bedevil us, and calling on people everywhere who want peace to join in that pursuit, Obama made a bid to marginalize violent extremists. Today, they appear a bit smaller and more out of touch.

In tone and in fact, it’s what the world needed to hear.

LETTERS POLICY | THE LEADER

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- Letters may be edited for space considerations.
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ARTIST’S VIEW



COMMENTARY | LEONARD PITTS JR.

Lacking facts, try confusion

So Newt Gingrich now says Sonia Sotomayor is not a “racist” after all. She must be trembling with relief. Gingrich’s backpedaling came last week in an article on HumanEvents.com. It leaves just two high-profile Republicans, former Rep. Tom Tancredo and radio blowhard Rush Limbaugh, still clinging to that absurd allegation.

As you know unless you are just back from Antarctica, this sudden spasm of righteous Republican rage is due to a speech Sotomayor gave in 2001 about the role gender, ethnicity and other characteristics play in a judge’s judgment. “I would hope,” she said, “that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn’t lived that life.”

It is, yes, a wince-inducing statement. You might even call it a tone deaf and culturally chauvinistic one. But does it support comparisons to the Ku Klux Klan such as Tancredo and Gingrich have made? Not in a million years.

The attempt to paint Sotomayor as such represents more than political overreach. No, this is part and parcel of a campaign by conservatives to arrogate unto themselves and/or neutralize the language of social grievance. We’ve seen this before. They sullied the word “feminist” so thoroughly even feminists disdain it. They made “lib-

eral” such a vulgarity you’d never know liberals fought to ban child labor, end Jim Crow or win women the right to vote.

Having no record of their own of responding compassionately to social grievance (ask them what they did during the civil rights movement and they grow very quiet), conservatives have chosen instead to co-opt the language of that grievance. And if what they did to the language of women’s rights and progressivism took some gall, what they are seeking to do to the language of race suggests a testicular circumference of bovine proportions.

There is something surreal about hearing those who have historically been the enemies of racial progress define racial progress as looking out for the poor white brother.

And whatever comes beyond surreal is what describes these three men in particular, none of whom has ever been distinguished by his previous tender concern for racial minorities lied upon, denied upon and systematically cheated of their square of the American Dream, telling us “racism” is what happens when a Hispanic woman says something dumb about white men. We are, after all, talking about a man (Tancredo) who once called majority Hispanic Miami “a third world” country, and another man (Limbaugh) who advised a black caller to “take that bone out of your nose.”

These are fighters against racism?

You keep waiting for someone to break up laughing. You keep looking for Ashton Kutcher to say you’ve been punk’d.

But they are in earnest, and there is a pattern here: The forces of intolerance seeking to redefine the parameters of a debate they can win in no other way. Read the treatises that attempt to make Martin Luther King Jr. an icon of conservatism. Read the ones which claim the relative handful of black-on-white violent crime occurring annually in this country constitutes “genocide.” Read the mewling of white victimization that rises any time blacks or browns are perceived as having won some victory over discrimination.

There is to it a breathtaking cynicism and a willingness to manipulate for political gain one of the rawest places in the psyche of a nation. The goal is not to persuade. It is to muddy the water, confuse the debate. Because when you can’t win the argument, confusing it works almost as well.

Based on one foolish quote, we have spent a week asking if Sonia Sotomayor is a racist. I’d call that mission accomplished. And I wish Kutcher would come out already.

It’s not funny anymore.

■ Leonard Pitts Jr., winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, is a columnist for the Miami Herald.

NATIONAL VIEW | MIAMI HERALD

Cuba should accept democracy

Now that the hemisphere’s diplomats have opened the door for the readmission of Cuba to the OAS, the question is whether Cuba is ready to come in from the cold. Don’t bet on it.

As a practical matter, the decision changes very little. Acting by consensus after some hard bargaining behind closed doors, the Organization of American States lifted the 1962 suspension of Cuba, but it made clear that returning to the fold would mean accepting “the practices, purposes and principles of the OAS.” That should be easy enough for most countries – but not for Cuba.

The reason that Cuba was drummed out of the OAS to begin with is that it had forsaken all pretense of abiding by the democratic principles that led to the founding of the organization. For decades, it sought to sabotage democratic governments throughout the hemisphere, a practice that continued until the Cold War ended and its Soviet patron disappeared.

Today, it remains the only country in the hemisphere whose leaders have never faced – and dare not face – a democratic election. The government routinely tramples on human rights and denies the most basic political freedoms, from free expression to the right of assembly and all forms of dissent.

The Obama administration is right to claim that engagement is a better policy than isolation, but we would have preferred stronger, enforceable conditions to readmit Cuba. This compromise ignores a totalitarian regime’s strangulation of its people’s basic human rights for 50 years. Cuba owes its isolation not to any maneuvering or machiavellian schemes emanating from Washington, but rather its own anti-democratic stance. That makes Cuba the odd man out, and Fidel and Raul Castro doubtless prefer it that way.

To the end, Venezuela and Nicaragua fought to lift Cuba’s suspension unconditionally, leaving a path

open to readmission without any action on the part of the Castro government to amend its behavior or acknowledge the validity of democratic principles.

The failure of this initiative indicates that Cuba and its OAS allies have little to crow about.

There is undoubtedly a new and growing attitude of independence and assertiveness by the nations of the hemisphere against domination by Washington, as indicated by the gesture to lift Cuba’s suspension. The Obama administration has worked deftly with regional countries to ensure that this does not become an obstacle to improvement of relations with our neighbors.

As long as OAS members continue to uphold and champion democratic principles, they should have no argument with the United States. The argument is with those who do not accept democracy and human rights, and they reside in Havana.

Coccho, Reed can give it a shot, but may not get far

Frank Coccho is considering running again for Corning mayor. Corning Mayor Tom Reed is thinking about running for Congress.

CITY BEAT



Je Dunning

Two guys seemingly headed in different directions who, if they pursue these paths, will wind up in the same spot: out of office.

I’m not trying to discourage either man from following their political dreams. Are you kidding?

I’d like nothing better than to have Frank Coccho back into the picture, at least during the campaign season. Talk about entertainment. Pass the popcorn, sit back, watch and expect the unexpected.

As for Reed, sure, go on and challenge Eric Massa for his congressional seat. Reed has said before he had loftier political aspirations beyond the mayor’s office, although going from Corning to Washington with just one term under his belt is quite a leap. But, hey, he’s got more experience in public office than Massa did when he twice ran against Randy Kuhl and finally won.

So to both Coccho and Reed I say: “Go. You’ve got the green light. Swing away and swing hard.”

But try as they may, I don’t see either one of them hitting one out of the park. To be honest, I don’t see them reaching the warning track or even getting the ball out of the infield.

In Coccho’s case, there would be no escaping the past. His performance during his one term as mayor is still too fresh in the minds of city residents.

The truth is it may never be forgotten. Fluoridation. Stray cats. The champions wall. Velvet ropes. Sexual harassment allegations. The list goes on and on.

As for Reed, it would be a case of the opposition being too strong. So far, Massa has done a pretty good job doing what he said he was going to do. Unless Massa royally slips up, I don’t see an opponent – especially an unseasoned one like Reed – getting much traction against him.

Reed also isn’t very well known outside the city limits, although I’m told he’s got some party support in Monroe County. Still, he’d have to work night and day from now until November 2010 for folks in other parts of the congressional district just to remember his name. Massa had to, and it took him four years to do it.

All of that campaigning costs money, probably somewhere between \$2 million and \$3 million. Where’s Reed going to get that much loot?

The National Republican Congressional Committee and political action committees would kick in some, but a whole lot more would have to be raised by Reed himself. That takes time and, frankly, there’s not enough time between now and the election to raise that much money.

If Reed decides not to run again for mayor in November and instead dedicate his time to a congressional campaign, that wouldn’t necessarily give Coccho a free shot to return to City Hall.

Rest assured the Republicans will run someone – anyone – if Reed decides to sit out. And whoever that is – with the possible exception of Councilman Frank Muccini – he or she would likely beat Coccho pretty handily.

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