

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

All the horrors of all the ages were brought together, and not only armies but whole populations were thrust into the midst of them. The mighty educated States involved conceived – not without reason – that their very existence was at stake. Neither peoples nor rulers drew the line at any deed which they thought could help them to win. Germany, having let Hell loose, kept well in the van of terror; but she was followed step by step by the desperate and ultimately avenging nations she had assailed. Every outrage against humanity or international law was repaid by reprisals – often of a greater scale and of longer duration. No truce or parley mitigated the strife of the armies. The wounded died between the lines: the dead mouldered into the soil. Merchant ships and neutral ships and hospital ships were sunk on the seas and all on board left to their fate, or killed as they swam. Every effort was made to starve whole nations into submission without regard to age or sex. Cities and monuments were smashed by artillery. Bombs from the air were cast down indiscriminately. Poison gas in many forms stifled or seared the soldiers. Liquid fire was projected upon their bodies. Men fell from the air in flames, or were smothered often slowly in the dark recesses of the sea. The fighting strength of armies was limited only by the manhood of their countries. Europe and large parts of Asia and Africa became one vast battlefield on which after years of struggle not armies but nations broke and ran. When all was over, Torture and Cannibalism were the only two expedients that the civilized, scientific, Christian States had been able to deny themselves; and they were of doubtful utility.

--Winston Churchill, written when he was Great Britain's Secretary of State for War (1919-1921), as quoted by Churchill biographer Martin Gilbert. (Hat tip to Paul Johnson's *Modern Times*.)

“UNINTERESTING TIMES.”

There is a well known, “ancient Chinese curse” that I suspect is more popular among American columnists who are looking for an opening line for their latest musing than it ever was among the ancient Chinese. It goes as follows: “May you live in interesting times.”

One problem with this particular malediction is that all times are interesting, each in its own way. After all, humankind is a rancorous, curious, restless, energetic, fickle, and, generally speaking, murderous species, whose disposition is to form an astonishing array of overlapping cliques, packs, communities, and nations, and to use these as vehicles for conflicts of various sorts and intensity, including all out war. Indeed, if an “intelligent designer” created mankind for the purpose of having an endlessly interesting spectacle to watch, like Thoreau's anthill, it seems quite certain that He, or She if you will, has not been disappointed.

In this Issue

Uninteresting Times.

Bush and Kim.

Yet, as anyone who is familiar with history knows, some periods are more interesting than others, and this is especially true if “interesting” is defined as not being simply entertaining or even remarkable, but in the sense that the Chinese fellow who came up with this “curse” seems to have meant it, i.e., extremely treacherous and politically unsettled. And this brings us to our thought for the week, namely that, using this definition, we would argue that we are currently living in comparatively *uninteresting* times.

Now we know that this observation is hostile to the conventional view that the threat from Islamic terrorism today is at least equal to if not greater than that presented to 13th century Europe by Ogedei Khan’s Mongol Hordes. And we are further aware that a possible response to this claim of ours might be, “so what?” To which, we would argue that if one is in the business of considering the future, as all investors are, it is useful to occasionally spend a little time trying to put the present into perspective, since a misconception about the nature of the here and now is likely to lead to misjudgments as to what lies ahead.

So we will begin this week’s analysis of the present with the above-stated premise, namely that we are living in comparatively “uninteresting” times. And we would argue that to think otherwise would be to believe that this is as “interesting” as it is going to get, which we think would be to badly misjudge just how much more “interesting” times are likely to become in the future.

For starters, we would note that one of the most remarkable features of the present day is the absence of a bitter conflict between competing political and economic ideologies. This is not to say that the world has reached Hegel’s “end of history,” or as Francis Fukuyama described it, “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

It is to say, however, that the disagreements between men and nations today are not, for the most part, suggestive of the kind of grand, intellectually driven

arguments that became so much a part of world history in the aftermath of the “self evident” yet revolutionary declaration by America’s founders that all men are created equal and endowed by God with certain unalienable rights. This extraordinary assertion set off a genuinely “interesting” and bloody, two-centuries-long, worldwide conflict over what type of government and economic system would best serve mankind.

The intellectual element of this process was astounding, giving rise to an explosion of political treatises, elaborate manifestos, and blueprints for novel approaches to government; a long string of new, politically directed philosophical theses, sociological hypotheses, and economic theories; and a huge canon of politically charged novels and poetry. Taken together, this chewing on the subject of how humans should order their lives could rightfully be considered one of the greatest intellectual pursuits of all times. From Madison and Jefferson to Adam Smith and Burke, from Spencer to Weber, from Hegel to Nietzsche, from Marx to Mussolini, Hitler, and Lenin, from Carlyle to Tolstoy, Kipling, and T.S. Eliot, for 200 years the debate among brilliant men and women from all walks of life and disciplines twisted and turned and soared to magnificent heights and descended to the depths of chaos and old night.

Needless to say this process was not exclusively intellectual. Indeed, some of the participants were so dead set against having the conflict decided by debate and peaceful experimentation in the social, political, and economic laboratory of life that they engaged in mass murder and all-out war in an attempt to assure that their particular approach to government would become the standard for all humankind.

In his notable book, *Death By Government*, R.J. Rummel contends that in the 20th century alone, upwards of *170 million* people were murdered as an integral part of this “interesting” competition between monarchy, liberal democracy, communism, socialism, national socialism, fascism, martial imperialism, and even anarcho-primitivism. And this does not count the deaths that resulted from the related wars.

Indeed, according to Rummel, the 40 million war casualties of the 20th century are small potatoes when compared to the men, women, and children [who] were “shot, beaten, tortured, knifed, burned, starved, frozen, crushed, or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hung, bombed, or killed in any other of the myriad ways governments have inflicted death on unarmed, helpless citizens and foreigners.”

And just as the intellectual debate was populated with extraordinary individuals, so was the physical side of the conflict. In fact, Rummel notes that seven “megamurderers” were directly responsible in the 20th century for killing over 120 million civilians. They were Stalin (42.7 million), Mao Tse-Tung (37.8 million), Hitler (20.9 million), Chiang Kai-shek (10.2 million), Lenin and Tojo Hideki (4 million each), and Pol Pot (2.4 million).

As I said earlier, this battle to determine “the final form of human government” is largely over, for the time being at least. Fukuyama may not have been correct in stating that liberal democracy has won the day, but among its chief competitors only banal totalitarianism has survived as a viable alternative and even it, in most of its manifestations, pays some form of obeisance to both democracy and capitalism.

For example, while the current leaders of China and Russia still publicly honor the megamurders who paved the way for their exalted rule by slaughtering tens of millions of their fellow citizens, these men long ago abandoned the “scientific” communism that motivated their revered founders. The new rulers of these formerly communist nations are little more than uninteresting, common thugs, of a kind that has been around since the beginning of human history. For them, the ideological struggle has been replaced by a practical striving to cobble together a mongrelized form of government that incorporates some limited appearance of democracy to appease the masses, some free market capitalism to assure some degree of economic success, and some old style authoritarianism to guarantee that they remain in power. This process is instinctive rather than intellectual. There is no more ideological component to it than there is in the daily activities of a New Jersey mob boss or a wolf pack.

Of course, the Islamic terrorist community would maintain that I am wrong about all of this; that their movement is more of a threat to liberal, capitalistic democracy worldwide and more ideologically and philosophically driven than all of the above-mentioned “isms” put together. But this is nonsense.

Militant Islam is a cult. It is a very large, well financed, and extremely dangerous cult. But it is a cult nevertheless. It represents a relatively small element of Islam worldwide. It honors various movement heroes, living and dead, but has no singular, universally recognized, leader, and it has no widely accepted blueprint for achieving its ends. Indeed, the movement is deeply fractionated along numerous ethnic, tribal, and religious fault lines.

Its foundation is indeed ideological. But it is a retrograde, reactionary ideology that seeks to concentrate governmental power in the hands of religious authorities whose views are tied to a badly outdated, medieval social model that is unattractive to a majority of the world’s Muslims and repulsive to virtually all non-Muslims worldwide. Iran is probably the best example of a serious attempt to establish a modern society around the social, legal, and economic conditions that radical Islam espouses, and the result has been widespread popular discontent and economic stagnation.

Militant Islam has no geographic location it can call home. It is an Internet chat room movement. It has friends and allies in various countries around the world, but no nation, including Iran, can be regarded as a permanent safe haven for the movement. As such, militant Islam has no formal army, no industrial base, and no source of funds aside from individual contributions and participation in a variety of illegal activities. Its principal iconic figure, Osama bin Laden, purportedly lives in a cave. He is an outlaw who cannot appear in public, so his principal form of recruitment and proselytization is via videotapes played on public television stations. To the degree that he exercises direct leadership control over any part of the movement, it is done largely via messengers and other back door channels.

In fact, not a single “leader” of militant Islam can rightfully claim a significant position on the world stage today. They are, for the most part, small-minded plug-uglies, who may dream of murdering millions, destroying entire civilizations, and governing great nations, but on a day-to-day basis they are generally engaged in the task of organizing individualized assaults that will kill a relatively small number of people or blow up a single structure or vehicle. To the degree that some sort of grand strategy links these activities, it revolves around the foolish hope that they will collectively instill sufficient fear to convince entire nations to retreat from the world stage, leaving it to the strutting and fretting of the noble Islamists.

In the 1940s, Adolf Hitler unleashed one of the most powerful conventional armies that the world had ever seen. He conquered much of Europe and presented a dire threat to Great Britain and Russia. Moreover, he launched a concerted effort to kill the entire Jewish population of Europe and succeeded in murdering six million before he was defeated. As noted above, he was directly responsible for the deaths of an additional 15 million civilians. Rummel notes that besides Jews, these included men, women, handicapped, aged, sick, prisoners of war, forced laborers, camp inmates, critics, homosexuals, Slavs, Serbs, Czechs, Italians, Poles, Frenchmen, and Ukrainians. Among them, were one million children under eighteen years of age.

The founders of the Soviet and Chinese Communist states were even more prolific in the art of murder. But in their case, it is also worth noting that by the early 1980s, almost one-third of the world’s population was ruled by oppressive Communist governments, the two most powerful of which had the capability of destroying the United States and Europe with nuclear weapons or, if they chose, going toe-to-toe with the West in a crippling conventional war.

It is hard to tell what thoughts occupy the minds of Osama bin Laden and his ilk as they hide in their caves and “safe houses.” But whether they know it or not, there is no chance that they will realize any dreams they may have of killing millions of people or of creating the kind of “interesting” times for their

enemies that the megamurders of the 20th century did for theirs. These men are killers, but they are small time killers. And their effort to use the sword to assure that Islam is the “final form of human government” for the entire world is delusional.

I am not trying to minimize the immediate danger that militant Islam poses to the United States and its allies or to democracy and capitalism. Technology has placed an astonishing amount of destructive power into the hands of individuals and small groups. This is a fact of life in the 21st century. It is a consequence of the times, not a testimony to the power of militant Islam. The technology exists. It will be used for both good and evil purposes. Militant Islam just happens to have an itch that needs scratching at the present moment. It could just as well be Irish nationalists, or locally grown hate groups that are threatening to blow up the Holland Tunnel or LAX.

Indeed, one could argue that the United States is fortunate that the first enemy it has encountered that is dedicated to the use of terrorism as its principal weapon is unfocused and unorganized, and largely unskilled and unimaginative in the use of this highly destructive weapon.

The worrisome thing is that the relative ineptness of the Islamists and the resultant success that the United States has enjoyed since September 11, 2001 in protecting itself against further terrorist attacks from them will instill the belief in Americans that the danger is overstated; that the efforts that have been made to protect them from future attacks are too expensive and too intrusive; that the *New York Times*’ treasonous betrayal of these efforts is of no consequence; that this is as “interesting” as terrorism is likely to get.

For the terrible fact is that someday, some determined nation, possibly Islamic but just as possibly not, is likely to put the same kind of effort into converting the slapdash terrorism of today’s Islamists into a modern weapon of warfare as military men of the past did with regards to artillery, tanks, airplanes, and special operations. And when some nation has the wherewithal to bring this form of warfare onto the

battlefield in an organized and sophisticated manner, it will realize the same potential to change the world as the communists and the fascist once did. And then the times are likely to get interesting once again.

For make no mistake, a modern, technologically dependent, open society, such as the United States is today, could in fact be brought to its knees by a well-coordinated, synchronized terrorist assault on its power, communications, and transportation grids, its food and water supplies, and on pre-selected areas of population concentrations with biological and chemical weapons.

In the meantime, ordinary Americans should enjoy these “uninteresting” times while they last; recognize that they are indeed less interesting than they are likely to become; do everything in their power to support those in the government who are trying to keep them uninteresting for as long as possible; and take advantage of the time to prepare for the worst. For humankind is a rancorous, curious, restless, energetic, fickle, and, generally speaking, murderous species, whose disposition is to form an astonishing array of overlapping cliques, packs, communities, and nations, and to use these as vehicles for conflicts of various sorts and intensity, including all out war. You can count on it.

BUSH AND KIM.

Throughout the entirety of his presidency, it has seemed that George W. Bush can do nothing right. From Iraq to Iran, from immigration to the economy to Social Security, whatever he does, it is wrong. Democrats and others on the left insist that he’s a mentally deficient, fear-mongering, robber baron war criminal. Many on the right vilify him as well, calling him everything from an appeasing capitulator, who refuses to make the necessary hard choices, to an aggressive neoconservative romantic unable to deal with reality.

Some of this is politics as usual. Some of it is human nature. And some of it is the madness that Bush has an uncanny ability to engender in his opponents of all political persuasions. But whatever the cause of this deep and abiding belief in the omni-fallibility of George Bush, the upshot of it has been an ever-increasing incoherence on the part of public elites concerning some of the most important issues of the day.

Critics and pundits complain that the Bush presidency has been marked by an acute “coarsening” of public debate. That’s all well and good. But what’s more pertinent – and more obvious – is the increasingly ill-informed and thus misleading nature of that debate. With nearly every politician, analyst, policy expert, and journalist trying his or her damndest to define his or her position or argument specifically in opposition to the President’s, the public discourse on serious and important issues has become virtually incomprehensible and, in some cases, embarrassingly unhinged.

Take, for example, the issue of North Korea. The story of Kim Ding Dong, his nuclear bombs, and his aptly named No Dong missiles is, by now, well known: The weird little dude was trying to build nukes in the 1990s, and everyone knew it. President Clinton’s foreign policy gurus met the challenge head on by going to Pyongyang several times. Madame Albright danced up a storm in her dreadful leather skirt and Zoro hat, while the administration signed a series of agreements that ended the nuclear threat and brought “peace in our time.”

Of course, the problem with the North Korean nuclear accords was that the North Koreans didn’t honor them. Indeed, they never had any intention whatsoever of honoring them, meaning that while the Clintonites went home blissfully ignorant, the North Koreans went back to work on their nuclear weapons program until finally, after the Clintonites had been mercifully sent into retirement, they managed to put it all together and to build a bomb or two (or three or four). Lil’ Kim was thus able to increase exponentially the leverage that he would have in all future dealings with the global community, and has been making a general pain of himself ever since.

Now, given this historical context behind the current North Korean “crisis,” one might expect that those responsible for the manifestly failed policy that precipitated it, as well as and those who supported that policy most enthusiastically, would have enough sense to keep quite or, at the very least, to avoid drawing attention to themselves and their failures. But then, one would be wrong.

Last week, after Kim decided to celebrate American Independence Day by launching his own fireworks, the Clinton administration alumni couldn’t reach for their phones fast enough in their enthusiasm to call the network news guest bookers, offering their services as expert analysts willing to tell the entire world how this (and everything else) was all George Bush’s fault. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who served as Clinton’s Energy Secretary, Ambassador to the United Nations, and employer of last resort for Bill’s 24-year-old erstwhile girlfriend, was among the first to grace our television sets, appearing on the CBS “Early Morning” show to declare that the Bush “policy isn’t working, obviously, with what’s happened,” and to insist that the way to deal with a crazy man like Kim is simply to give in to his every demand and then bury your head in the sand. He put it thusly (emphasis added):

North Korea is unpredictable. You don’t negotiate with them like they’re another country. They’re surreal. They’re totally isolated. They’re tightly controlled, the cult of personality. They don’t react like you and I do. It’s not give and take with them. *It’s take, and then they will gauge your reaction as to how soon it takes for you to agree with them.* So you can’t normally deal with them like any other country negotiating with each other . . . The reality is that North Korea is dangerous. And it makes sense to deal with them directly. Now, we did that in the Clinton administration. *For ten years, they didn’t develop nuclear weapons. Yes, they went out of their agreement but, at the same time, that worked, that broad stability.”*

Think about that for just a minute. The North Koreans “went out of their agreement,” which, as we now know, means that they maintained their weapons program all along. Yet Richardson insists that as long as we all just covered our eyes and pretended not to see it, the world was able to enjoy “broad stability.” That is, of course, until Bush came along and ruined everything by failing to indulge Kim’s eccentricities and refusing to pretend that he couldn’t see what was really going on.

It truly is difficult to say which is more pathetic: that Richardson actually got away with passing this Pablum off as legitimate “analysis;” or that he is considered one of the brightest and most talented Democratic foreign affairs experts and, more to the point, a possible future presidential candidate.

In any case, Richardson was not the only, much less the looniest, former Clinton official to sprint to the nearest network affiliate screaming all the way that Bush was ruining everything. Indeed, for sheer anti-Bush dishonesty and self-delusion, Richardson couldn’t hold a candle to Wendy Sherman, who, as Clinton’s “Counselor of the Department of State” and “Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State and North Korea Policy Coordinator,” was one of the architects of the 1990s “see no evil” strategy.

Ms. Sherman told Fox News that she and her administration colleagues had everything under control with regard to Kim and his nukes and that all the problems related to North Korea could be traced to one of two presidents named George Bush. The first President Bush allowed Kim to start his weapons programs, and the second one allowed the programs to be restarted, presumably by refusing to “get tough” with Kim by giving in to his demands and agreeing to bilateral negotiations. “It’s time,” Sherman told *Fox & Friends*, “to get serious about what we’re doing to stop North Korea’s not only missile capability but more importantly their nuclear capability.”

But while the Clintonites and other assorted Democrats were running around attacking President Bush for his refusal to act unilaterally, the mainstream

press was busy claiming that Lil' Kim's missiles were proof that Bush's unilateralist, "go it alone," "cowboy" foreign policy doctrine is a miserable failure. In the cover story for this week's *Time* magazine, for example, Mike Allen and Romesh Ratnesar declare that the "Bush Doctrine," which they describe as "cowboy diplomacy," has finally met its end in the confrontation with North Korea. They write:

After September 11, however, the Bush team embarked on a different path, outlining a muscular, idealistic, and unilateralist vision of American power and how to use it. They aimed to lay the foundation for a grand strategy to fight Islamic terrorists and rogue states, by spreading democracy around the world and pre-empting gathering threats before they materialize. And the U.S. wasn't willing to wait for others to help . . .

But in the span of four years, the administration has been forced to rethink the doctrine by which it hoped to remake the world. Bush's response to the North Korean missile test was revealing: Under the old Bush Doctrine, defiance by a dictator like Kim Jong Il would have merited threats of punitive U.S. action. Instead, the administration has mainly been talking up multilateralism and downplaying Pyongyang's provocation.

Not to put too fine a point on this here, but based on this passage, one can only conclude either that Allen and Ratnesar are among the most ill-informed journalists in America (with the most ill-informed editors) or that they are liars. Anyone who knows anything at all about the manner in which President Bush has handled North Korea knows that his policy has never been shaped by anything even resembling a "unilateralist vision." He has never once even hinted at the idea of "punitive U.S. action." In fact, from the very moment that it became clear that Kim and the Ding Dongs had violated their agreements and produced nuclear weapons, Bush has insisted that there would be no one-on-one meetings between

the United States and North Korea and that any negotiations would have to include East Asia's regional power brokers, namely China, Russia, and Japan.

It's true, as Allen and Ratnesar have noted, that Bush has been "talking up multilateralism" with regard to North Korea. But he's been doing so for roughly *four years now*. Of course, the very notion of Bush being a committed multilateralist doesn't fit the story that *Time* is pushing, so rather than bend their narrative to fit the facts, they have apparently decided to bend the facts to fit their narrative.

Of all the commentary and analysis written in the wake of Kim's missile tests last week, the only piece that made a whole lot of sense was that turned in by Edward Luttwak, an old friend of The Political Forum who is currently a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International studies. In an article published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Luttwak argues that while Kim's North Korea is a serious threat, it is not necessarily an imminent one, in that its missiles are "crude North Korean copies and enlargements of the Soviet Scud family of missiles, which was itself a 1950s upgrade of German V-2 technology, with the same liquid-fuel propulsion that requires lengthy pre-launch preparations (during which the missiles can easily be destroyed) and gyroscopic guidance that has median inaccuracies measured in miles rather than yards."

Given this, Luttwak argues essentially that Kim's displays are less about actual military strategy and more about stomping his feet and calling attention to himself in the hope that the United States, South Korea, and Japan will give in – just as they did in the 1990s – and offer him some candy if he will stop throwing a fit.

Luttwak suggests that the reason that Kim returns to this tried-and true tactic over and over is because it has worked in the past and, at the very least, continues to win him the attention he so desperately craves. "Kim," Luttwak writes, "is a prize buffoon whose threats and pronouncements should never be

acknowledged, let alone contested in any way.” And the way to deal with him in the future is simply to “let silence be the response, along with a bit of ridicule.”

Now, there is no question that Luttwak is right and that as long as Kim’s threat remains theoretical rather than practical, the best way to deal with him might be to treat him like the spoiled child he is and to ignore his tantrums. But that said, even Luttwak misses the larger point here, which is that Kim isn’t really the target of Bush’s piqued response. As strange as it might sound, in the great debate over what to do about North Korea and its nuclear weapons program, Kim is largely irrelevant. This is not to say that Kim is not dangerous or not an important part of this equation. Obviously, he is both. But the target of the American response and, by extension, the Japanese response, to North Korean belligerence is China and, to a lesser extent, Russia.

I (Steve) put it this way three-and-a-half years ago in a piece written for Lehman Brothers.

Because of the nature of the weapons he possesses, Kim does present a “global problem.” Beyond that, though, it is unclear why the global consensus is that this is somehow an American issue. Indeed, given its location, an aggressive, nuclear North Korea presents a significantly greater problem for other large and powerful nations, namely Russia and China, than it does for the United States.

Yes, there is the matter of 37,000 American troops just south of the DMZ (with more in Okinawa); and yes, our allies (South Korea and Japan) would appear to be the most threatened by this. All that notwithstanding, our immediate interest in North Korea is for the most part the relic of a bygone era. The same cannot...be said of Russia and China, smack dab in between which Kim’s “workers’ paradise” rests. (As [columnist Mark] Steyn put it, North Korea “is a pipsqueak in the shadow of two big-

time nuclear players, China and Russia.”) Both China and Russia have significant motivations that transcend ideology or Cold War politics to keep Kim restrained.

This is especially true of China. Although Beijing looks on Pyongyang as an ostensible ally and views Kim Jong Il as one of its last remaining “fellow travelers,” an aggressive nuclear North Korea is not something it relishes; such would make life awfully difficult for Hu Jintao and the rest of the Chinese leaders for several reasons. First, the most likely long-term U.S. response to North Korean military bluster would be to strengthen the defenses of our unswerving allies in the region, Taiwan and Japan. Both would certainly want to be brought under the umbrella of any future U.S. regional missile defense plan, and both would want to enhance (substantially) their military capabilities. The end result of this could be a nuclear Japan to balance a nuclear North Korea. All these things would make Beijing extremely unhappy, as they would imperil the PRC’s long-term goal of regional hegemony.

So while President Bush’s domestic detractors continue to squawk hysterically about the importance of either starting or ending unilateral action against North Korea (depending on which ill-informed source one believes), the President himself continues to hold fast to his belief that the best way to deal with the threat is to make those with the most at stake handle it. Bush isn’t misjudging Kim. And he isn’t giving Kim what he wants. If anything, he’s not really worrying about Kim at all. He is, rather, playing a high stakes game of “chicken” with the Chinese, presuming that they’ll flinch first, given that Kim’s provocations will threaten them sooner than they will the United States.

In the week since Kim demonstrated to the world that his long-range missiles are not yet ready for prime time, President Bush has nonetheless spoken openly

about American intentions to upgrade its missile defenses and to shoot down any future launches, even going so far as to admit that he was prepared to shoot down this last missile, had it not fallen harmlessly from the sky after less than a minute's flight. More to the point, the Japanese have also spoken openly about Kim and his regime, becoming notably more assertive in their posture toward Pyongyang.

Last week, the Japanese announced their desire to push a joint American-Japanese regional missile shield more aggressively. Over the weekend, the Japanese welcomed the USS Mustin, a 509-foot guided missile destroyer to the port of Yokosuka. And just this morning, the Japanese Defense Agency announced that it was contemplating the possibility of preemptive action against North Korea and considering the legislative procedures necessary to permit such an attack under country's overtly pacifistic constitution.

None of this can make the folks in Beijing too terribly happy. And if you add it to the fact that American diplomats are openly calling China out on the matter, with Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill questioning China's influence with Kim, the Chinese have to be steaming more than a little bit.

Even prior to last week's fizzled fireworks display, the Chinese had been growing more and more frustrated with North Korea and its increasingly unpredictable and therefore potentially destructive behavior. The StrategyPage blog noted last week that even Chinese humanitarian aid to North Korea has been stopped because of Pyongyang's provocations. To wit:

[F]ood and fuel supplies sent to North Korea have been halted, not to force North Korea to stop missile tests or participate in peace talks, but to return the Chinese trains the aid was carried in on. In the last few weeks, the North Koreans have just kept the trains, sending the Chinese crews back across the border. North Korea just ignores Chinese demands that the trains be returned, and insists that the trains are part of the aid program.

Taken together, what all of this means is that there is a very real chance that the Chinese will flinch first and will take care of Kim before he does them irreparable damage. Naturally, there is no guarantee that this is how things will play out, and certainly the Chinese will continue to drag their feet as long as they can. But the bottom line is that President Bush's policy toward North Korea is not the miserable failure his opponents insist it is. Indeed, with pressure on China increasing daily, it is not unreasonable to expect that the Bush doctrine may, in fact, prove highly successful in the near future.

Just as with Iraq, the President's opponents seem most determined to give up on the fight against North Korea just as victory is finally beginning to appear possible. They believe that their knee-jerk opposition to everything the President thinks, says, and does makes them look thoughtful and responsible. But in reality, it just makes them look foolish and, in the long run, endangers their political futures.

Copyright 2006. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved.

Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.