



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

The Superpower Myth **by Sheldon Richman**

What does it mean to be the world's only superpower? Like Gulliver in Lilliput, the U.S. government is bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now faces the emergence of two new nuclear powers in North Korea and Iran. There seems to be nothing President Bush can do about it.

He sent UN Ambassador John Bolton to the Security Council, where he won sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear test. According to the *New York Times*, the Security Council resolution “primarily ... bars the sale or transfer of material that could be used to make nuclear, biological and chemical weapons or ballistic missiles, and it bans international travel and freezes the overseas assets of people associated with the North's weapons programs.”

The resolution also calls on “all countries to inspect cargo going in and out of North Korea to detect illicit weapons.” This sounds like a measure designed to force a clash with Kim Jong Il. What happens when that occurs?

We must bear in mind that nothing is more resilient than the black market. For decades the U.S. government has tried to keep illegal drugs from entering the country. It has been unable to keep them out of the prisons.

So sanctions may be little more than window dressing. As the *Times* reported, “But China's refusal to take part in searches, and Russia's seeming annoyance at the end of the process, immediately raised questions about how effective the resolution's execution could be.”

No one therefore should sleep better because the Security Council has “acted.” Some want to see the Bush administration engage Kim in one-on-one negotiations. But negotiations mean that each side offers something. What would the United States offer? In the past it has provided aid, but this is objectionable on two counts. First, previous aid didn't keep Kim from pursuing his nuclear program. More important, American taxpayers should not be forced to assist Kim's evil, decrepit regime. For one thing, while assistance would help *him*, it would do little for the long-suffering North Korean

people. Moreover, the North Korean government is almost universally condemned because it flouts the rights of “its” people. Where is the logic in the Bush administration’s flouting the rights of Americans in dealing with Kim’s government?

There is something the administration could offer, but it’s not likely to want to do so. It could agree to remove the 37,500 American troops from South Korea, to end the alliance with Seoul, and to pledge never to start a war, including an economic war, with North Korea. That’s something an American president should have done a long time ago. The North Korean government has had grounds for distrusting the United States since the war in the early 1950s, which began when North Korea invaded South Korea. U.S. participation in that war — President Harry Truman’s undeclared “police action” — was unjustified from the standpoint of limited government and the safety of the American people. But it told the world that the United States was assuming the role of world policeman. That couldn’t help but create fear of — and enemies for — America. It also gave North Korea’s communist dictator a powerful propaganda tool with which to keep the North Koreans scared and loyal.

Now, and especially after what happened to Saddam Hussein in Iraq, is anyone mystified by Kim’s desire for a nuclear weapon?

Short of assurances to North Korea, there is nothing President Bush can properly do to reduce the potential nuclear danger from North Korea. Even he seems to realize that war would be a disaster for everyone concerned.

Nuclear weapons are part of the modern world. Iran and other nations will soon join the club. The U.S. government, the only government to use nuclear weapons — and on innocent civilians to boot — has little moral standing to lecture others. Moreover, any government efforts to protect us will likely make things worse through corruption and ineptitude. If there are technological ways to shield us from a nuclear attack, the government should step aside and let private enterprise discover them.

*Sheldon Richman is senior fellow at The Future of Freedom Foundation, author of **Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State**, and editor of [The Freeman](#) magazine. He will be among the 22 speakers at FFF’s [upcoming conference](#) on June 1-4 in Reston, Virginia, entitled “Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy and Civil Liberties.” Visit his blog “Free Association” at www.sheldonrichman.com.*

This article was originally published in October 2006.