

Why Is America Softer on North Korea Than Iran? Israel.

Did you know that America is softer on North Korea than it is on Iran . . . because of the Israel lobby?

That's the conclusion of Leslie H. Gelb in the *Daily Beast*. He notes that we've allowed North Korea to obtain and test nuclear weapons while at the same time vowing that Iran will never gain the bomb. He begins:

The White House press corps should ask President Obama this question: You've told Iran's leaders that if they come close to marrying a nuclear warhead with a missile that can hit the United States or our allies, they should expect a U.S. military attack on their soil. Specifically, Mr. Obama, you said your policy on Iranian nukes was "prevention," not "containment" or "deterrence." You were not nearly as tough, specific, and threatening to North Korea.

Of course President Obama inherited a much more advanced North Korean program than Iranian, but it is certainly true that America is talking tougher with Iran. Prevention, not containment, is the goal, and the military option isn't off the table. While we've drifted close to open war on the Korean peninsula, we've never indicated that we'd go as far to stop North Korea as we have to stop Iran. Why? Here's Gelb again:

Administration officials would never admit it, but the main reason for their being tougher on Iran than North Korea seems tied to American domestic politics as much as or more than anything else, specifically the standing of Israel and oil versus Korea and Japan. On strictly foreign-policy and national-security grounds, Democratic and Republican

officials surely regard Seoul and Tokyo as important as the Mideast, certainly now with the growing importance of Asia. In American politics, however, Israel and oil count for much, much more. It's notable that President Obama made his strongest pronouncements about employing force to stop Iranian nukes at the annual meeting of AIPAC, the very potent group of American-Jewish backers of Israel. There is nothing remotely comparable for any and all Asian countries, whatever the strategic and economic criticality of Asia.

Israel and oil count for much, much more than the “growing importance of Asia”? Tell that to the tens of thousands of American soldiers actually stationed in South Korea—while none are stationed in Israel to defend its borders. In fact, our historic investment in South Korea dwarfs our investment in Israel, in blood (more than 30,000 combat deaths) and treasure.

Moreover, the risks of confronting North Korea, even before it tested nuclear weapons, were orders of magnitude greater than the risks of confronting Iran. Millions of South Koreans live within the range of one of the world's largest collections of artillery, with thousands of weapons poised to rain death upon Seoul with little notice. For decades, our own soldiers existed as a vulnerable tripwire force, designed to demonstrate our commitment to South Korea but also sure to take heavy casualties in the opening hours and days of a new conflict. In other words, North Korea, antiquated and isolated as it may be, was and is an extraordinarily deadly force.

In fact, to the extent Iran is learning lessons from our experience with North Korea, it's learning that sufficient conventional forces can deter military intervention. Thus Hezbollah stockpiles missiles on Israel's northern border, hoping to create a similar sense of fear for Israeli civilians.

North Korea was able to deter America. Iran is doing all it can to achieve the same capability. The differing threats and capabilities of these two countries has nothing to do with the Israel lobby and everything to do with geography and history. The president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations should know better.

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