
US STRIKE ON IRAN COULD HAVE CONSEQUENCES IN NORTH KOREA

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The U.S. strike that killed Irans top military commander may have had an indirect casualty: a diplomatic solution to denuclearizing North Korea.

Experts say the escalation of tensions between Washington and Tehran will diminish already fading hopes for such an outcome and inspire North Koreas decision-makers to tighten their hold on the weapons they see, perhaps correctly, as their strongest guarantee of survival.

North Koreas initial reaction to the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani has been cautious. The countrys state media was silent for several days before finally on Monday issuing a brief report on the attack that didnt even mention Soleimanis name.

The Korean Central News Agency report didnt publish any direct criticism by Pyongyang toward Washington, instead simply saying that China and Russia had denounced the United States over last weeks airstrike at the airport in Baghdad.

The Norths negotiations with the U.S. have been at a stalemate since last February, when a summit between leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump collapsed over disagreements about exchanging sanctions relief for nuclear disarmament. The North has recently pointed to that lack of progress and hinted it may resume tests of nuclear bombs and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

While the killing of Soleimani may give Pyongyang pause about provoking the Trump administration in such a way, the North ultimately is likely to use the strike to further legitimize its stance that it needs to bolster its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent against American aggression.

The North has often pointed to the demises of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi while justifying its nuclear development, saying they would still be alive and in power had they successfully obtained nuclear weapons and didnt surrender them to the U.S.

Soleimanis name will soon be mentioned with them too, said Koh Yu-hwan, a North Korea expert at Dongguk University.

North Korea would say that the imperialist nature of the United States would never change, and that there is no other option for them other than to strengthen its nuclear deterrent while bracing for long-term confrontation, said Koh, an adviser to current South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

Its clear Pyongyang has been closely watching the developments between Washington and Tehran since the Trump administration in May 2018 abandoned a nuclear agreement Iran reached with world powers in 2015.

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