

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Walter C. Clemens Jr.** *North Korea and the World: Human Rights, Arms Control, and Strategies for Negotiation.* Asia in the New Millennium Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016. Illustrations, maps, figures, tables. 464 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-6746-6.

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Walter C. Clemens Jr. is a Harvard International Relations professor with an extensive and well-respected publishing record. Although his International Relations roots lie in the study of the USSR, and now Russia, he successfully links USSR/Russian geopolitics in the Far East to the challenges presented by their Korean Peninsula neighbor.

Clemens builds on, updates, and significantly deepens the concepts and perspectives he developed in his 2010 work *Getting to Yes in Korea*. As evidenced in both of these book titles, Clemens sees negotiation as the key tool in working to bring a sense of stability and normalcy to the Korean Peninsula, a culture and a region long wracked by external interference and internal challenges. Further, he intertwines concepts of humanity and social obligation into the hot-button conversation of a nuclear-armed North Korea and discusses how not only the United States but also regional actors and powers should deal with the situation. In the end, he offers several options to deal with North Korea in the future. He presents these options in a Goldilocks format: four are too cold, six are too hot, and one is just right.

The author's style is clear and free of specialist jargon. He uses interesting analogies to illustrate concepts such as policies being more complex than a Beethoven symphony, and more akin to a Bach concerto with its constant point and counterpoint. Clemens also spares no details, digging into individual situations and events as well as historiography to a depth that almost obviates the

need for the reader to gain an additional source to gather further insights. For readers with little exposure to the issue(s), this expansive treatment of the background brings an immense amount of context to help with understanding the challenges. For example, he details the impact of US senior policymakers intentional omission of the word "Korea" from all diplomatic and International Relations discussions, speeches, references, and strategy considerations from 1910 to 1945. His treatment goes beyond the Korean Peninsula and encompasses the wider regional impacts, such as the impact this policy had on Japan as well as the Philippines. Another example of his detailed and exhaustive treatment of the context that created the current Korean situation is his description of the ebbs and flows of the contentious political situation between the USSR and the People's Republic of China and how they both regarded the Korean Peninsula.

To frame his advocacy for this careful negotiation strategy with North Korea, he presents nine alternatives. These alternatives are the practical equivalents of the BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) in a negotiation and range from ignoring North Korea to intensified sanctions to preemptive kinetic action. Seemingly all have been tried before, but Clemens works the current context into his recommendations to further amplify their pros and cons. In the end, his recommendation, even with its detractors and difficulties, leans toward patient, assurance-based negotiations with North Korea. As a pragmatic note, he does answer his question "can, should, and must we negotiate with a regime we

regard as evil?” with a conditional “yes.” He argues that we must engage North Korea, despite its horrendously evil character, with the condition being that “all parties would need to perceive and work for outcomes beneficial to key stakeholders” (p. 352).

This book is recommended for anyone who seeks both an in-depth and thorough examination of the events and contexts that brought the global community to this point as well as a desire for an informed perspective on

the possible way ahead. The authors of this review can only wonder what North Korea’s senior leaders might consider as a way ahead after reading this book about “them.”

*The views expressed in this review are those of the reviewers and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the air force, the Department of Defense, or the US government.*

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