

VISITING KOREA

Our son Wayne served in the army for a number of years, and we visited with him when we could. When he was stationed in Hawaii it was relatively easy to see him as I was on my way to the Marshall Islands. We saw him only one time when he was stationed in Korea.

His job in military intelligence was a good one, and I took some pleasure in hearing what his job was like, and comparing it to mine. They were not unrelated.

In South Korea we visited the demilitarized zone, or DMZ, and set foot, technically, in North Korea. It was in the room on the border with one half of the room in each country. We enjoyed seeing the armed soldiers looking through the window at us. It was so obvious that buildings on the North Korean side were built just for show, with false fronts and other construction fantasies that it is difficult for us to understand why it mattered.

But most any part of Asia is hard for Americans to understand.

One of my task force friends, a general, told me of one of his experiences in Korea. Their headquarters janitors were soldiers in the Republic of Korea (ROK) army. One of them was stealing from them regularly, and they caught him. He was taken to an ROK colonel, who asked him if he had been stealing. The soldier confessed that he had. The colonel then opened his desk drawer, took out a gun and shot his soldier, that that was that. The general told me that was the last time the Americans turned over any offending ROK soldiers to the ROK army.

North Korea remains most difficult for American diplomats. Their traditional actions—threatening to REALLY go nuclear—always seemed to work. Successes with blackmail kept them going.

When they at last had their first nuclear test, we happened to have as our house guest in Loveland, Colorado Professor Dingli Shen who was at that time the director of the Center for American Studies in Shanghai. We were able to share

our concerns. The probability of the North Koreans choosing that time for their test would appear to be vanishingly small. It was a very interesting moment in my long list of such moments.

When they had their second nuclear test in May, 2009, it was evidently a successful one. They've really gone nuclear, and belong to the nuclear club. Shortly after the event I heard our Secretary of State affirm rather dramatically that "there will be consequences!" and I was fairly amused. Traditionally we "consequence" with North Korea by sending money. This time around it might cost us quite a bit.

It is not at all clear what the future holds for us and North Korea as their actions almost always defy rational thought. This makes predictions pretty unlikely.

Despite my concern about them I have never really been frightened, for I think almost any significant international crisis with American troops present would bring about their very quick collapse.

Nevertheless they bear watching, and disbelieving.