

Scrapbook**Albright in North Korea, and more.**

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Diplomatic Failure 101

Is there a Korean word for "chutzpah"? That was our reaction last Tuesday listening to Madeleine Albright on CNN. Speaking by phone to Larry King just hours after North Korea began test-firing missiles, the former secretary of state told us to blame--you guessed it--George W. Bush. "Frankly, Larry, I think the problem here is that we are watching the failure of five years' worth of American diplomacy," Albright said. "I'm very worried about it, and I hope very much that we do have a review of our North Korean policy."

THE SCRAPBOOK is not sure what sort of "diplomacy" Madame Secretary has in mind. Maybe she thinks Condi Rice should serenade the North Korean foreign minister with spoofs of show tunes. Or maybe she thinks her successor should attend one of those Macy's Day Parade-type propaganda routines in the streets of Pyongyang. She could sit next to Kim Jong II, and later toast the Dear Leader over a bottle of champagne.

We're joking, of course. But we thought it worth recalling two of the seminal moments in Albright's own North Korean diplomacy. In July 2000, at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Bangkok, Albright said of her North Korean counterpart: "Just had my first handshake, with Foreign Minister Paek. Used to think he was a rogue, but here at ARF, he's so in vogue." To be fair, her remark was part of a silly ritual in which diplomats make clowns of themselves by performing song-and-dance skits on ARF's final night.

Less funny was her trip to Pyongyang the following October, which earned Albright a scathing rebuke from the Washington Post editorial page:

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she found "amazing" the pageant she watched in Pyongyang alongside North Korean leader Kim Jong II. We found it amazing, too, but not for the same reason. We were amazed that the secretary of state would allow herself to be photographed, smiling, as 100,000 essentially enslaved laborers performed for her and one of the world's most repressive dictators. Secretary Albright clinked champagne glasses with Mr. Kim; she found him to be "very decisive and practical and serious." But about the nation's 150,000 political prisoners, she had no public comment. . . . Her silence on this repression diminished U.S. credibility, not only in North Korea but in less threatening countries where the administration chooses to speak, more openly, about human rights.

The hallmark of Clinton policy was supposedly the 1994 Agreed Framework, which banned Pyongyang from churning out nukes in return for billions worth of aid. But as the North Koreans have since acknowledged, they spent most of the '90s trying to produce weapons-grade uranium--and, in 1998, launched a Taepodong-1 rocket over Japan. Meanwhile, as they diverted foreign aid into WMD and missile factories, millions of North Koreans died of starvation.

"Looking at this record," quipped Investor's Business Daily, "maybe Albright actually had it right. North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons and ever-more sophisticated ballistic missiles--including the Taepodong-2 C launched this week--were indeed the result of five years of failed diplomacy. It's just that the five failed years lasted from 1994-1999."

Great Moments in Social Science

On the blog of political scientist Dan Drezner, we came across one of the cleverest pieces of academic research in recent memory: a paper by Ray Fisman of Columbia University and Edward Miguel of Berkeley--both economists affiliated with the National Bureau of Economic Research--entitled "Cultures of Corruption: Evidence from Diplomatic Parking Tickets." Thanks to the presence of the United Nations headquarters in New York City, coupled with the loophole known as diplomatic immunity, which allows the ambassadors of every nation on earth to violate New York's parking laws with impunity, a unique research opportunity presented itself. As the authors explain,

Corruption is believed to be a major factor impeding economic development, but the importance of legal enforcement versus cultural norms in controlling corruption is poorly understood. To disentangle these two factors, we exploit a natural experiment, the stationing of thousands of diplomats from around the world in New York City. Diplomatic immunity means there was essentially zero legal enforcement of diplomatic parking violations, allowing us to examine the role of cultural norms alone.

Fisman and Miguel's fellow scholars will be enthralled by their regression analysis, which shows a "roughly linear" relationship between the "existing country corruption index" and the corruption of diplomats as measured by their "New York City unpaid parking violations." In layman's terms: "cultural or social norms related to corruption are quite persistent: even when stationed thousands of miles away, diplomats behave in a manner highly reminiscent of officials in the home

country. Norms related to corruption are apparently very deeply ingrained."

All you non-scholarly types out there will want to turn straight to the handy chart on page 18: "Average Unpaid Annual New York City Parking Violations per Diplomat, 11/1997 to 11/2002." Here are the worst violators, the top of the heap, the dirty dozen: Kuwait, 246.2; Egypt, 139.6; Chad, 124.3; Sudan, 119.1; Bulgaria, 117.5; Mozambique, 110.7; Albania, 84.5; Angola, 81.7; Senegal, 79.2; Pakistan, 69.4; Ivory Coast, 67.1; Zambia 60.4.

Remember: Those are the average number of unpaid tickets each diplomat racked up per year. Totals are even more impressive. Egypt, for instance, had 24 diplomats in its mission for the years in question, meaning the mission as a whole failed to pay 16,752 parking tickets from November 1997 to November 2002.

The full study can be found here.

Bigotry in Our Time

All those years when THE SCRAPBOOK took potshots at the New York Times, we understood ourselves to be engaged in press criticism. Silly us. Turns out, according to the unassailable logic of San Francisco Chronicle columnist Jon Carroll, that criticism of the New York Times is a deviously clever form of Jew-baiting.

Quoth Carroll: "The name of the New York Times contains the word 'New York.' Many members of the president's base consider 'New York' to be a nifty code word for 'Jewish.' It is very nice for the president to be able to campaign against the Jews without (a) actually saying the word 'Jew' and (b) without irritating the Israelis."

Hmm. If we accuse Carroll of auditioning for a column at the Times, could that be construed as anti-Semitic?

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