

Kim cautioned

Zhu Feng says China's stinging rebuke of North Korea's provocations marks a shift in its approach towards a wayward ally - Beijing has signalled it will take action if pushed, perhaps even in concert with Washington

After nearly a month of belligerent bluster from North Korea, China appears to have had enough, ending its silence about North Korea's brinkmanship and suddenly roaring its disapproval of its ally's reckless threats. China's exceptional tough talk does not necessarily mean that it intends to abandon Kim Jong-un's regime; but, at the very least, it does suggest that a radical shift in China's policy towards North Korea might no longer be unthinkable.

When Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) exchanged phone calls with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon last Saturday, he expressed China's rejection of rhetoric and action aimed at destabilising the northeast Asian region. Moreover, Wang made it clear that China would not allow "troublemaking on China's doorstep".

The next day, President Xi Jinping (习近平), speaking to an assembly of primarily Asian political and business leaders at the annual government-sponsored Boao Forum, declared that no country



The warning is stern: China may send Kim to the sidelines if he does not change his behaviour

"should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gain". Xi did not mention any country by name, but his implicit condemnation of North Korea was clear to all.

Before these official rebukes, there had been much speculation about whether China would risk a fundamental change in its relations with North Korea, the socialist "little brother" that it continues to subsidise heavily. Following the rare display of open indignation by Xi and Wang, such speculation has now become stronger than ever.

Some ask what "value" Kim's hermit kingdom provides that prevents China from acting decisively; others wonder to what extent Chinese leaders' domestic concerns continue to inhibit their willingness to switch course on North Korea.

In fact, China's leaders have agonised over North Korea's recent provocations. They have been struggling to persuade the Kim regime to temper its volatility and

accept a "grand bargain": official recognition and normalisation of relations with all of its neighbours, and with the US, in exchange for denuclearisation. Indeed, this has led to considerable squabbling between the two nations in recent years.

China understands that North Korea's intractability is rooted in its deep isolation from the world, mass deception of its people, and Kim's fear of losing control of a country that only his family has ruled. So the country's rulers have come to believe that they can gain attention and resources only through provocation.

For China, the Kim regime's survival can be assured only if it follows China's lead in reforming and opening up. But, faced with South Korea's shining democracy and booming economy, the Chinese model is irrelevant to the North: following it would mean acknowledging the South's supremacy on the Korean Peninsula, and thus an instant loss of legitimacy.

During the past two decades, North Korea's leaders have experimented lightly with minimal "reform", only to retreat from it quickly. China patiently bore this pattern of intermittent brinkmanship and timid reform, largely owing to its belief that the risks posed by the Kim dynasty could be controlled as long as China did not cut off the regime's lifeline of oil, food and other necessities.

More important, China's leaders believed that by shielding the North from US pressure, it was acting in the interest of its own national security.

But here China's analysis has been completely wrong, for it underestimates the Kim regime's unmanageable desperation whenever it believes that its survival is in doubt. Moreover, North Korea does not want to be beholden to any power, including China. So it exploits China's goodwill and national-security concerns, and even regards Chinese patronage as its due.

A further complication concerns the nuclear aspirations of North Korea. Pyongyang appears to be convinced that, with nuclear weapons, it can maintain diplomatic independence, and that China, fearing nuclear blackmail, will never abandon it.

Now, however, it is North Korea's turn to make a mistake. Kim's childish tantrums have genuinely enraged China. Yes, the country's leaders have sometimes complained about the heavy burden of subsidising North Korea; but, until now, they had never shown such open disgust with the North's performance.

China's warning that it will not allow North Korean "troublemaking on China's



doorstep" can be considered the equivalent of a "yellow card" in soccer. China has not decided to abandon North Korea. But the warning is a stern one for Kim: China may send him to the sidelines if he does not change his behaviour.

US Secretary of State John Kerry is set to visit Beijing this weekend. It is now time for American and Chinese leaders to negotiate a real and viable exit from the current crisis, while productively exploring ways to

restart the denuclearisation process on the Korean Peninsula.

If Kim's bombast and nuclear threats lead to China-US bonding over a joint North Korea settlement, the entire world will be the safer for it.

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Hidden help

Louisa Mitchell says Hong Kong women's 'progress' towards gender equality is nevertheless built on the work of an army of foreign women

Early last month, a group of foreign domestic helpers protested against the requirement that they live with their employers. They disagreed with the requirement's rationale that living-in is necessary because it offers them support in a city where rent is extortionate and migrant women are vulnerable. But PathFinders, an organisation that works with distressed migrant workers, says the live-in arrangement puts helpers on an uneven footing with their employers and permits abuse. This comes on top of their "minimum allowable wage" of HK\$3,920 per month, low by Hong Kong standards, and other poor treatment.

The live-in requirement also explains why Hong Kong has few of the care options that other cities offer, such as part-time help, workplace crèches and "nanny share" arrangements. The difficulty of hiring temporary or part-time help means that if a helper falls sick or pregnant, she is invariably dismissed.

There are also many families that have neither the means nor the space to hire a full-time, live-in helper. In the past, the prevalence of extended families under one roof meant there were family members available to provide care as needed, but now the average household size has shrunk.

For the 10 per cent of households that can afford help, the close to 300,000 domestic helpers in Hong Kong are credited with fulfilling an invaluable role, enabling middle-class women to stay in the workforce. In turn, an increase in the female labour force participation is often trotted out as evidence that gender equality is on the way to being achieved.

But is it really? A recent generational analysis of Hong Kong women's progress commissioned by Civic Exchange and The Women's Foundation showed that the median monthly employment earnings for a woman in her 20s in 2011 was HK\$8,800. But when helpers (who constitute 17 per cent of women in their 20s) were excluded, it was HK\$10,000, the same as for men. Similarly, for women in their 30s, excluding helpers (who made up 19 per cent of that age group), their earnings were HK\$14,500, close to the HK\$15,000 for men.

The truth is that the earnings equality between Hong Kong's men and women has been achieved almost entirely at the expense of these helpers. Hong Kong, as a society, still undervalues "women's work".

In addition, research by the Chinese University suggested that in some households, the employment of helpers led to the almost complete withdrawal of male partners from domestic work. Yet women need greater equality at home in order to achieve greater equality in the workplace, a theme underscored by Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg in her recent book, *Lean In*.

As with the thorny issue of right of abode, the recent protest over living-in emphasises the need for a broader debate about the rights of helpers and their true economic and social value.

Introducing greater flexibility into the domestic help market would benefit a larger number of Hong Kong families. For this to happen, the administration needs to address the constraints imposed by housing costs, and traditional attitudes towards foreign domestic helpers need to change.

Louisa Mitchell is an independent social policy researcher. This article is part of a series on women and gender issues, developed in collaboration with The Women's Foundation

Government should warn against travel to flu-stricken areas on the mainland

A video clip has been circulating online recently, showing a mainland tourist trying to avoid paying to travel on the MTR. When caught, the tourist tried to wangle his way out by requesting to see the "leader" at the station. The MTR employee responded by saying there was no so-called leader but proper rules and systems in Hong Kong. His answer left the mainland speechless.

The rules and systems of which the employee spoke are built on core values respected and cherished by most Hongkongers. Unfortunately, judging from the way the government has been handling the issue of travel alerts recently, we seem to have become a city that is more controlled by leaders than guided by a proper system.

A proper travel warning system should cover all places outside Hong Kong that are frequently visited by Hongkongers and these areas should include popular destinations like Taiwan, Macau and mainland cities.

Unfortunately, the current system excludes Taiwan, Macau and the mainland. At present, despite the emergence of the deadly H7N9 bird flu virus in some cities in eastern China, our Security Bureau has refused to issue any travel warning, saying it doesn't have the mandate to do so.

This exclusion has given many travel agents the excuse not to refund customers who wish to change their plan to travel to the affected areas, forcing many travellers to stick with their itinerary. Anyone who falls sick while abroad could

Albert Cheng says the alert system needs to cover all places outside HK, and be guided by concern for people's safety, not political motives



bring the virus back to Hong Kong and spread it in our community. Hence, this is not only an unscrupulous business practice, but also immoral. It is the responsibility of our government to warn locals against travelling to affected places on the mainland. The current system that doesn't include the mainland in its



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purview is flawed. The government must plug this loophole as soon as possible.

Besides, it could issue verbal warnings to stop travel agents from organising tours to affected areas, especially the so-called educational tours for students to promote national education.

The government's reluctance to do anything raises the suspicion that it believes it is more important to follow the central government's order to brainwash our students than to protect their safety or prevent the virus from spreading here. Along with the Security

Bureau, the Education Bureau also deserves blame for doing nothing to stop these national education tours.

The decision not to issue travel warnings to affected areas on the mainland is a political gamble. If any Hongkongers got infected and died as a result, who would take the blame?

Our current travel warning system is biased and inadequate. Take the black travel warning the government has issued against the Philippines. It has nothing to do with travel safety as the decision was politically motivated; it was a protest against the way Manila handled the 2010 hostage crisis.

With the rising tension between the two Koreas, and North Korea warning foreigners to leave South Korea in the event of a war breaking out, some countries have stepped up travel warnings to their nationals. Are our senior security officials sensitive to the latest political developments in the region?

Our officials don't seem to realise South Korea is a highly popular travel destination for Hongkongers.

If Pyongyang really fired missiles at Seoul and a war broke out between the two Koreas, the consequences could be unimaginable with many Hongkongers stuck in South Korea. Who in our government would be willing to shoulder the responsibility? Why not issue a black travel

warning now, to prevent unforeseen troubles or even possible tragedies?

The government, led by Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, seems to have brought back the administrative style popularised during the Tung Chee-hwa era. This is the ostrich approach, being oblivious to one's surroundings and thereby avoiding having to deal with problems.

To effectively prevent a pandemic, we must do more than the bare minimum. The Tung administration's decision to handle the severe acute respiratory syndrome crisis in a low-key manner when the virus first struck inadvertently helped it spread like wildfire in our community.

Today, we face a far more severe situation. With our open-door policy to mainland visitors, we are effectively inviting problems.

From the flaws in our travel warning system, to the way the government issues such warnings and how it might handle a possible H7N9 pandemic, it's clear that incompetent leadership has weakened our sense of crisis, putting the entire community at risk.

We must be prepared and help ourselves, instead of behaving like sitting ducks.

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No room for patriots who don't know right from wrong

Lau Nai-keung sees too few people taking a principled stand in politics

Several recent incidents perfectly illustrate the microcosm of Hong Kong politics in these turbulent days.

On March 26, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying was finally pressured to "confess" to phoning Beijing ahead of announcing the new stamp duty for non-local homebuyers. "Notifying" Wang Guangya (王光亚), director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, was an act of "internal diplomacy", according to Leung, and he denied seeking approval from Beijing on this matter. "It was not a request for instructions... since the buyer's stamp duty is levied on non-local buyers, it is necessary to deal with internal diplomacy and external diplomacy," Leung said "Hence, after we decided to impose the buyer's stamp duty - after the decision was made - we notified the relevant party."

This witch-hunt is of course absurd. The exchange between Leung and Wang has nothing to do with the Executive Council's confidentiality rule and certainly did no harm whatsoever to the principle of Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong. By using the term "internal diplomacy" and putting it beside "external diplomacy", Leung's administration wanted to downplay our special relationship with the mainland. However, the press is not that glib, and they were quick to find out that foreign consulates and embassies did not receive the same advance notice.

It is clear that Leung lacks a principled discourse to justify

the actions that he must perform as the head of a special administrative region within the country. Unfortunately, his wishy-washy responses gave people an impression that foul play was involved.

Communication with Beijing is not something to be ashamed of, and Leung shouldn't have restricted it only to circumstances where the mainland is affected.

Then there is the patriotic camp's war cry against the campaign to "occupy Central",



Occupy Central is not a colour revolution, but it is unreasonable, illegal and doomed to fail

calling it a "colour revolution". Such a label is misleading and will probably do more harm than good.

A Wikipedia search tells us that such movements used non-violent resistance to "protest against governments seen as corrupt and/or authoritarian, and to advocate democracy".

By calling Occupy Central a colour revolution, we imply that our government is corrupt and authoritarian to the extent that a general uprising is imminent, which is simply misleading. At the same time, most Hongkongers will not be able to

see anything wrong in "non-violent resistance". Occupy Central is not a colour revolution but it is illegal, unreasonable and doomed to fail.

Meanwhile, in a RTHK interview, Education Secretary Eddie Ng Hak-kim bent over backwards to accommodate potential "Occupy Central" protesters from the sector, thereby lending this illegal activity a false sense of legitimacy and encouraging adolescent participation.

This sent confusing signals to the public and neutralised the central government's attempt to discredit the campaign. The boomerang will come back to hit him, should he still be around next year.

Third, the patriotic camp has been bashing marginalised social groups ever harder in a desperate attempt to gain popularity. They, along with some media, depicted the young men who were accused of murder in two recent cases as losers with a record of anti-establishment behaviour. The "evidence": they joined protests. But, clearly, there was no such causal link.

As Thomas Jefferson said: "In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock." If a person does not have a heart and a clear sense of right and wrong, how can he or she love China or Hong Kong?

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