Failing the test

by Oliver_North

"Can we all get along? â€¦ Let's try to work it out." That was Rodney King's plaintive plea in May 1992, after his highly controversial confrontation with the Los Angeles Police Department led to arson and anarchy. Now, 17 years later, the Obama administration apparently has made "get along" its response to every national security test. So far, it has been the wrong answer.

Since Mr. Obama's announced his deadline for pulling U.S. combat troops out of Iraq, there has been a spike in violence in the Land Between the Rivers. His decision to "open a direct dialogue" with the theocrats ruling in Tehran has yielded thus far an Iranian satellite launch â€” using North Korean ICBM technology â€” a check ride on Iran's Russian-built Bushehr nuclear plant, and, just in case we didn't get the message, rejected visa applications for the U.S. women's badminton team.

"Nice guy" diplomacy hasn't worked very well elsewhere, either. Pakistan replied to the administration's "let's get along" overture by allowing Dr. A.Q. Khan â€” the world's most notorious nuclear weapons proliferator â€” to travel and "resume scientific research." Hamas responded to the promise of $1 billion in U.S. "reconstruction funds" by showering Israeli civilians with Iranian-made, Syrian-delivered, Egyptian-facilitated rockets.

Syrian strongman Bashar Assad's answer to last week's White House proffer of "dialogue with Damascus" came this week, when he told visiting Japanese journalists that such talks would "have to involve" the Iranian-controlled terror group Hezbollah. For those who may have forgotten, the only terror organization that has killed more Americans than Hezbollah is al-Qaida â€” on Sept. 11.

The "O-Team's" offer to "reboot" the U.S.-Russia relationship was so moving that Moscow bribed Kyrgyzstan's government into booting U.S. troops from Manas Air Base, a crucial base for supporting allied operations in Afghanistan. The Kremlin followed up by forging ahead with plans to sell advanced S-300 (SA-10) surface-to-air missiles to Tehran, presumably to help protect Iranian nuclear facilities.

With this track record as a preamble, it is not surprising that the People's Republic of China decided to conduct a little "O-Test" of its own. On Feb. 22, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton concluded two days of "very promising" meetings in Beijing by emphasizing that "the United States and China have a positive, cooperative relationship." Five days later, the U.S. and China resumed direct military-to-military "consultations" â€” talks that had been suspended in 2008, when the Bush administration sold Patriot air defense missiles to Taiwan. It went downhill from there.

On March 4, Chinese ships and aircraft commenced harassing the USNS Impeccable and the USNS Victorious while they were operating in international waters. The two unarmed, civilian-manned vessels (with U.S. Navy personnel aboard to operate specialized equipment) are designated as ocean surveillance ships.

Both are equipped with the newest generation of submarine tracking sonar, known as SURTASS LFA.

The Victorious â€” operating in the Yellow Sea, between the Korean Peninsula and mainland China â€” was approached at night by a Chinese patrol vessel using a high-intensity spotlight to blind lookouts on the ship's bridge momentarily. The Impeccable â€” operating about 75 miles off the coast of Hainan Island, which is a major Chinese naval and submarine base in the South China Sea â€” was "buzzed" repeatedly by Chinese Y-12 maritime patrol aircraft and then surrounded by no fewer than five Chinese vessels.

According to the official complaint filed with Beijing by the commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, the confrontation required the Impeccable to "maneuver to avoid" a collision with a Chinese navy frigate; the Chinese ships approached to within 25 feet of the U.S. vessel; and "high pressure water hoses were employed" to prevent the ships from being boarded. A Defense Department spokesman said that Chinese sailors made "an attempt to snag the Impeccable's towed acoustic array sonar" and described the incident as evidence of "increasingly aggressive conduct by Chinese vessels."

Provocations by the increasingly assertive People's Republic of China are nothing new. Nor are "tests" for new administrations by foreign rivals. George W. Bush was in office for less than 40 days when a Chinese J-8 fighter, harassing a U.S. Navy EP-3 70 miles off Hainan Island, collided with the slower, less maneuverable U.S. surveillance plane. The pilot of the Chinese fighter was killed; the EP-3 made an emergency landing on Hainan, and the crew was detained for 11 days. After the crew and plane were released, the U.S. suspended military-to-military talks with China.

Whether that was a sufficient response to a Chinese-provoked near catastrophe is arguable. But it was certainly more forceful than the Obama administration's continued affirmation that it wants to proceed with codifying the U.N. Law of the Sea Treaty. According to China, LOST precludes intelligence collection within their claimed 200-mile offshore "exclusive economic zone." Coupled with the warm welcome to Washington offered to Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi this week, it's enough to make one wonder whether the "O-Team" ever will pass the test. Can't we just get along?

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