

PRESSBOOK

Takashi MURAKAMI

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North Korea and a global reality check

Ted Cruz

OPINION

WASHINGTON On Oct. 31, the State Department faces a critical decision in our relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Iran-Russia-North Korea sanctions bill enacted in August included legislation I introduced that requires the secretary of state to decide whether to relist North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism within 90 days.

Look at the accusations against Pyongyang: the unspeakable treatment of Otto Warmbier; the assassination of a member of the Kim family with chemical weapons on foreign soil; collusion with Iran to develop nuclear ballistic missiles; cyberattacks on American film companies; support for Syria's chemical weapons program; arms sales to Hezbollah and Hamas; and attempts to assassinate dissidents in exile. Given this, the decision should be easy. In fact, Americans could be forgiven for wondering why North Korea is not already designated as a sponsor of terrorism. It used to be — and the story behind the decision to remove that designation nearly 10 years ago is the key to understanding America's failed assumptions about North Korea, how they led to Pyongyang obtaining its nuclear arsenal, and why the United States needs to reverse its approach and relist Pyongyang immediately.



A display in Tehran last month for Defense Week. The Revolutionary Guards oversee Iran's missile program, and its military budget was increased, but its business budget was cut.

Gnawing at a bastion of power

TEHRAN

Iran's president is striving to cut the economic role of the Revolutionary Guards

BY THOMAS ERDBRINK

From its nine-story headquarters in an upscale neighborhood of Tehran, a giant construction company directs its operations across Iran, building mosques, airports, oil and gas installations, hospitals and skyscrapers.

Armed guards stand watch at the doors, and small posters on its exterior walls honor Iranians who have died in the current wars in Syria and Iraq.

promising to unleash economic growth by completing a nuclear deal and freeing the country from international sanctions. Having achieved that — though some sanctions remain — he has turned his sights on the Revolutionary Guards, whose monopoly on large sectors of the economy and penchant for corrupt dealing he sees as a major drag on the growth he promised after completing the nuclear pact.

In his assault on a bastion of privilege and power long thought to be impregnable, Mr. Rouhani seems to have the all-important support of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader. The ayatollah, who has blasted officials for allowing corruption to grow in all layers of Iran's political system, called recently for the government to reach out to foreign countries for investments and new businesses.

"What I sought is that in the economy we must have free competition," Mr. Rouhani told a group of news media executives during his visit to the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September. "No institution can use its authority to derive a benefit. We must be open and fair, and there can be no exclusivity in any one sector."



President Hassan Rouhani wants to rein in the Revolutionary Guards, whose many companies enabled Iran to survive years of sanctions but are now seen as slowing growth.

A more open atmosphere for businesses, with open and fair competition and no exclusive sectors. For years, the construction giant and numerous other companies and conglomerates run by the Revolutionary Guards have operated with impunity,

well beyond the reach of the civilian authorities, driving Iran's sanctions-crippled economy, financing its military adventures in the region and — not coincidentally — enriching the hard-line commanders and clerics at their helms.

In Spain, mistakes and plenty of blame

NEWS ANALYSIS BARCELONA, SPAIN

Catalan separatists flouted Constitution, but Madrid has also fueled the conflict

BY RAPHAEL MINDER

The standoff over Catalonia's independence drive has now reached a sobering moment for Spain with the central government's announcement this weekend that it would take the drastic step of removing the region's secessionist leaders.

The situation probably never had to come to this extreme point, but now that it has, there is plenty of blame to share — and potentially worse pitfalls ahead on what amounts to a precarious and deeply uncertain path for a modern European democracy.

In announcing emergency measures on Saturday, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy took a backhanded slap at his chief antagonist in the dispute, Carles Puigdemont, the leader of Catalonia, a region where, he said, "things can't be done worse."

But analysts say that Mr. Rajoy shares the blame for allowing the conflict to spin dangerously out of control and that the remedy he has chosen is by no means assured to be a cure.

The current crisis over Catalonia's status is the result of years of miscalculations all around, which have now left not only Catalans but all Spaniards facing a grave challenge to the democratic consensus of the country.

"You need mistakes on both sides to get entangled in such a difficult and undesirable situation," said Pablo Simón, a politics professor at the Carlos III University in Madrid.

Catalan separatists have been flouting Spain's Constitution, he argued, but "the central government could have searched for political dialogue and really reached out to the more moderate Catalans."

"Between fiercely defending the status quo in Spain and claiming the right to self-determination," Mr. Simón added, "there are a lot of gray areas that have simply been left unexplored."

Separatism has century-old roots in Catalonia, a region that has its own culture and language. It was one of the factories that plunged Spain into a civil war in the 1930s that was then followed by a lengthy dictatorship under Gen. Francisco Franco.

But after Franco's death in 1975, Catalonia endorsed Spain's democratic Constitution. Working hand in hand with politicians in Madrid, conservative politicians in Catalonia acted as a buffer against smaller parties advocating secessionism.

Still, the desire for a distinct identity was not slaked. Catalans tried to fence SPAIN, PAGE 4

An artist releases his inner dragon

'Annoyed by his challenge,' a Pop Japanese master answers his mentor's call

BY HILARIE M. SHEETS

Takashi Murakami rocketed to international fame in the art world for his Pop Japanese anime-inspired characters and motifs that proliferate playfully and menacingly across paintings, sculptures and a line of commercial products. He entered high-profile collaborations with the luxury retailer Louis Vuitton in 2002 and later the rap star Kanye West that shyly navigated the avenues of consumer culture. In 2009, his major traveling retrospective opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and he joined the Gagosian Gallery, poised at the pinnacle of the art market.

But in the decade since, Mr. Murakami, 55, has retreated. Since beginning a sustained dialogue in 2009 with the Japanese art historian Nobuo Tsuji,



'Takashi Murakami: Lineage of Eccentrics,' at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, pairs the artist's works with Japanese art dating from the late 10th through 19th centuries.

three decades his senior, Mr. Murakami has found a mentor who has brought him into deeper engagement with historical Japanese art that has fueled the artist's prodigious imagination and marked a profound shift in his work.

"Professor Tsuji has given me the chance to have this breakthrough," Mr. Murakami said recently at the New York City branch of Kaikai Kiki, his studio headquartered in Tokyo that employs some 70 people in the production and promotion of his artwork. "He kicked my butt."

A tribute to their friendship and its creative fruits has just opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. "Takashi Murakami: Lineage of Eccentrics," on view through April 1, puts 15 of the artist's paintings and sculptures, as well as multiple studies, in conversation with 50 Japanese artworks dating from the late 10th through 19th centuries. They have been selected from the museum's collection of historical works by the two men, together with Anne Nishimura Morse, the museum's senior curator of MURAKAMI, PAGE 2

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CJ GUNTHER/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

“Takashi Murakami: Lineage of Eccentrics,” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, pairs the artist’s works with Japanese art dating from the late 10th through 19th centuries.

Releasing an artist's inner dragon

MURAKAMI, FROM PAGE 1
Japanese art.

The show includes the pairing of Soga Shohaku's 1763 "Dragon and Clouds," a 35-foot-long ink painting of a comically expressive dragon thrashing its tail through the clouds, with Mr. Murakami's never-before-exhibited 2010 reinterpretation done at almost twice the length. This was executed on a dare from Professor Tsuji, issued in a series of articles called "Battle Royale! Japanese Art History" published in the magazine *Geijutsu Shincho* from 2009 to 2011, when he picked themes and Mr. Murakami had to make works in response. For one, the scholar chose Shohaku's dragon and goaded the artist to paint something by himself rather than rely on his army of assistants.

"I was so annoyed by his challenge," said Mr. Murakami, who had first seen the Shohaku image reproduced in Professor Tsuji's 1970 book "Lineage of Eccentrics" tracing the wild originality of six artists from the Edo period (1615-1868), a volume that Mr. Murakami had found inspirational as a young artist.

"I decided to place a bind on myself and just do the whole thing in one go within 24 hours," Mr. Murakami said, "eliminating the process of meticulously designing and going straight to the canvas as if I were drunk."

Mr. Murakami's "Dragon in Clouds — Red Mutation" mimics the sweet goggle-eyed personality and physical dynamism of Shohaku's dragon and his splashing of pigment against the surface of the paper, so different from Mr. Murakami's trademark sleek hard-edge forms.

"Takashi has interpreted this in a very expressionistic way that I find tremendously exciting," said Ms. Morse, who collaborated with Professor Tsuji for over a decade in cataloging the museum's thousands of objects of Japanese art, including the Shohaku collection. "Takashi sees himself as a spiritual heir following on Shohaku," she added.

While Mr. Murakami finds his dragon embarrassing technically, he said, "it led

me to approach my own limit and begin making this series of massively scaled paintings that without my communication with Professor Tsuji would not have happened."

He is less disparaging of his 82-foot-long 2014 painting "In the Land of the Dead, Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow," a hallucinogenic landscape of figures and black skulls swept up in a tsunami of roiling water that is on view at the Broad museum in Los Angeles. Many studies for the painting are shown in Boston.

"That painting I feel is one answer I can give to Professor Tsuji," said Mr. Murakami, to show him "that I humbly received the 'Lineage of Eccentrics,' digested it myself and added something that is completely different from what I received."

Professor Tsuji called it a great honor to be a part of this creativity as an art historian. Through the magazine project "which was filled with drama, unpredictability and nonsense," he said, "I realized Murakami's genius, rare in an artist, in which he is able to assimilate wide knowledge from others and incorporate it into his works."

Mr. Murakami's deep dive into his own Japanese heritage was a way of addressing a kind of identity crisis, said Michael Darling, who organized the artist's recent retrospective "The Octopus Eats Its Own Leg" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. "He had reached this apex in his career around 2007, but I think it worried him and made him question why he was making art," said Mr. Darling, whose exhibition traced the artist's arc from smooth plasticized figures to mythical beasts and monks rendered craggy and gnarled and at gigantic scale. It was the most

highly attended show in the Chicago museum's history and opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery next year.

"Without saying that Murakami wasn't interesting before, which I don't believe," Mr. Darling added, "I do think that his relationship with Professor

Tsuji has had a real noticeable impact on his career and his development."

The show at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, highlights works inspirational to Mr. Murakami. He made an almost one-to-one copy of the conical lotus-shape base supporting a late-10th, early-11th century Buddha in the museum's collection and used it to prop up his own Buddha interpreted as an animation character in his sculpture "Oval Buddha Silver" (2008). Mr. Murakami's golden multipanel "Kawaii — vacances (Summer Vacation in the Kingdom of the Golden)" (2008), populated with a field of smiling flower faces, echoes the dazzling ornamentation of poppies on a gold ground in a 17th-century screen by the school of Tawaraya Sotatsu.

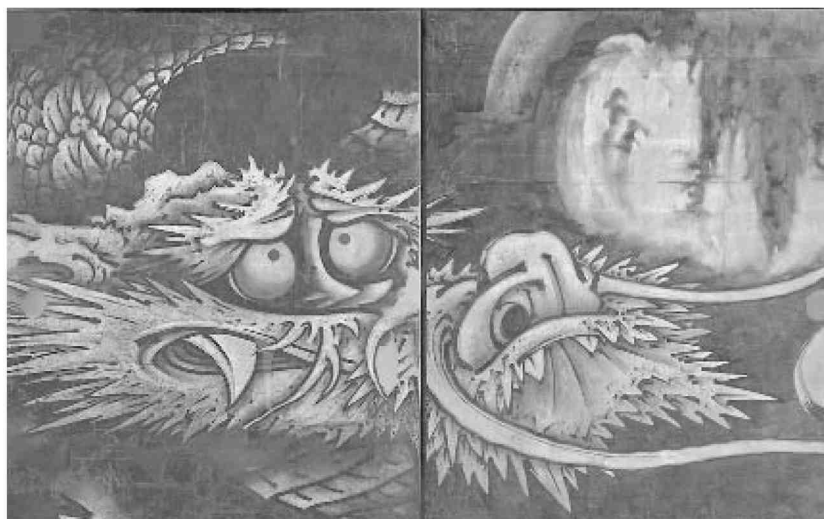
In a large-scale work commissioned especially for this show, Mr. Murakami aims to please his teacher. It incorporates the eccentric depiction of natural phenomena, including a direct reference to Shohaku's screen "Transcendent Attacking a Whirlwind" (circa 1764) where a tornado resembles a serpent's coiled tail. Speaking while the piece was still in progress, Mr. Murakami confessed that it had been very difficult and he had not yet succeeded.

"I want to show Professor Tsuji that I have been studying all he has given me," he said. "I'm hoping this work to be that."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

From left, the Japanese art historian Nobuo Tsuji; Anne Nishimura Morse, senior curator of Japanese art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the artist Takashi Murakami.



Soga Shohaku's "Dragon and Clouds" (1763) is featured in "Takashi Murakami: Lineage of Eccentrics," along with Mr. Murakami's reinterpretation of the work.