

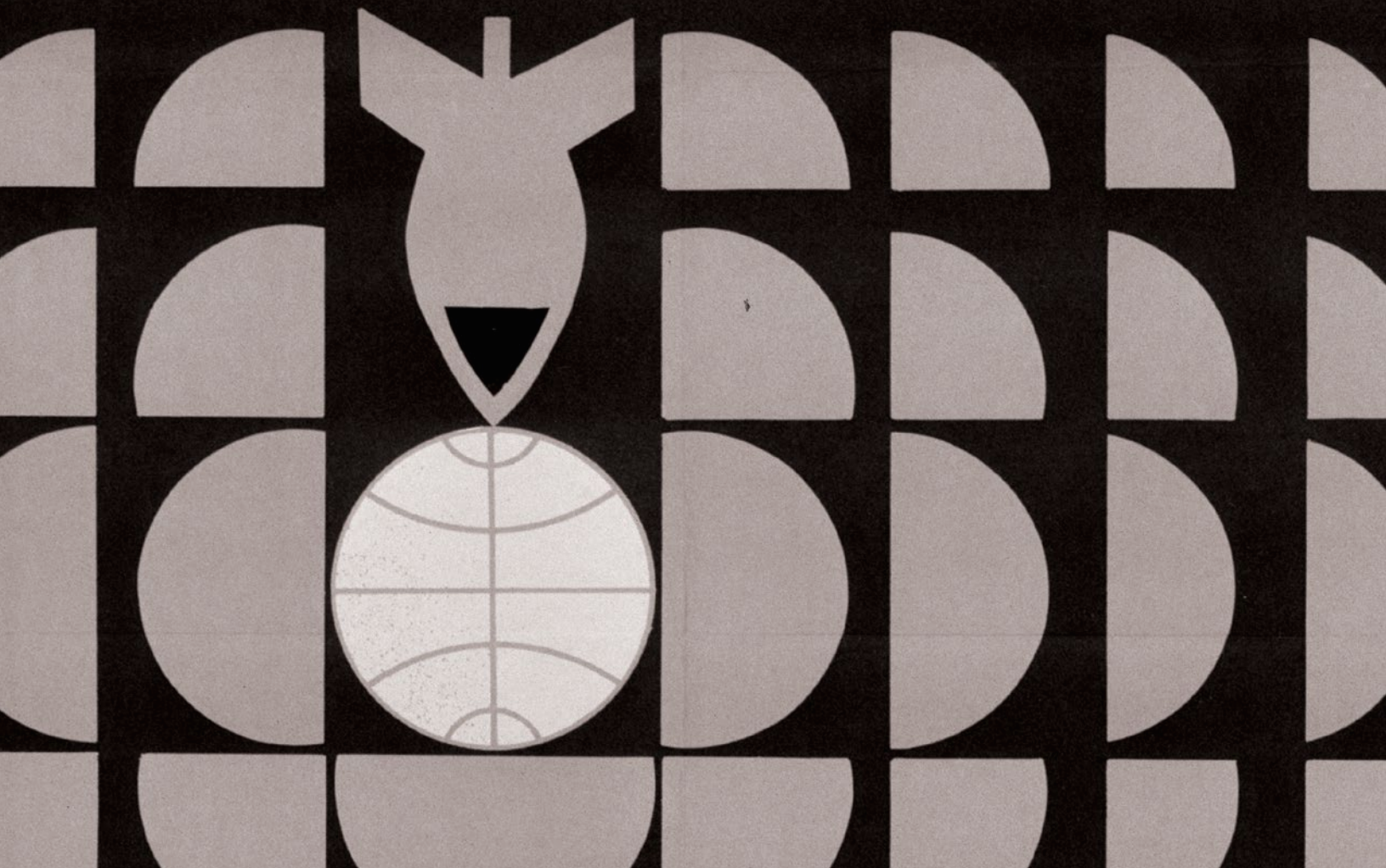


# STRATEGIKA

ISSUE 46

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

NOVEMBER 2017



## CONVENTIONAL WAR AGAINST NORTH KOREA

IN THIS ISSUE

MICHAEL AUSLIN • THOMAS DONNELLY • MILES MAOCHUN YU • ANGELO M. CODEVILLA  
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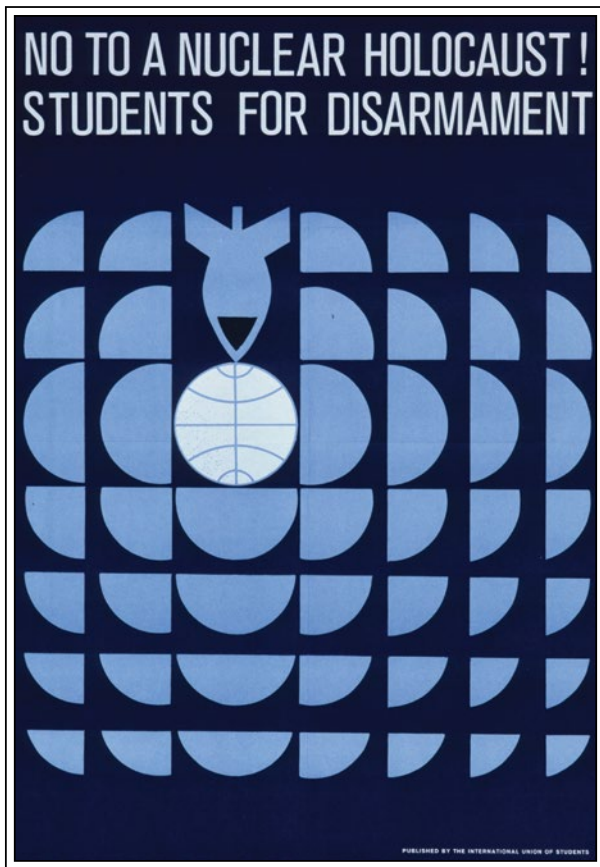


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## War Games on the Korean Peninsula

By Michael Auslin

Since the armistice ending hostilities in the Korea War was signed on July 27, 1953, the United States and South Korea have deterred North Korea from launching another invasion across the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Despite the size of the North Korean military, estimated at over one million men, the qualitative advantage of the Republic of Korea (ROK) military and its US ally have assured policymakers in Seoul and Washington that they likely would prevail in any major conflict.

The specter of a nuclear-capable North Korea has the potential to change that equation, not merely calling into doubt the ability of the United States and Seoul to defeat North Korea without suffering potentially catastrophic damage to themselves, but of whether they would be deterred from undertaking military operations in the face of a nuclear threat. Be it nuclear blackmail, the threat of nuclear retaliation, or even

the early use of a nuclear weapon on Seoul or Tokyo to try and force its enemies to capitulate, Pyongyang has sought both freedom and protection by gaining control of the world's ultimate weapon.

Yet since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the world has been spared the further use of nuclear weapons, including any exchange between nuclear powers. The United States in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan refrained from attacking their foes with nuclear weapons. Further, despite confrontations between India and Pakistan, China and Russia, China and India, and the decades of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, nuclear powers have limited themselves to the use of conventional forces in skirmishes and clashes with each other. Even the contemplated or threatened use of such weapons was seen as all but beyond the pale.

Whether the world will remain so lucky once North Korea has a functional atomic arsenal is the great question facing the world. Most observers and analysts seem to agree that Kim Jong-un will never use his weapons cavalierly, for to do so would be to open his regime up to complete annihilation. Nonetheless, in order to prevent an escalation up the nuclear ladder, US policymakers will have to think far more critically about what deterrence and containment of a nuclear North Korea will look like. While the threat of American use of nuclear weapons will remain the ultimate backstop of allied credibility, Washington will remain focused on conventional military options to deter and if necessary defeat North Korean aggression. Concurrently, defense planners will continue to plan how conventional measures could remove North Korea's offensive capability or even its regime.

In any combat scenario on the Korean peninsula, it is South Korean forces who will bear the brunt of the fighting. The South Korean standing military numbers 625,000, with another three million men who can be mobilized. Korean forces are divided into three main combat armies, with approximately 5,000 tanks and armored fighting vehicles, 6,000 artillery pieces, and 450 aircraft, including F-15s, F-16s, and F-5s. By

contrast, the current strength of United States Forces Korea (USFK), which commands all US troops in South Korea, is 37,500, comprised primarily of the 8th Army, with its 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, and the 210th Field Artillery Brigade; the 7th Air Force, with approximately 100 F-16s and A-10s; and smaller Navy, Marines, and Special Operations Forces components. For warfighting purposes, the two militaries are united in a Combined Forces Command (CFC). The CFC is commanded by an American general, who has overall direct control of both ROK and US forces in combat, with a South Korean deputy.

Yet, as stated on the website of USFK, the mission of US forces and their Korean allies is “deterring external aggression and defending the Korean Peninsula,” not eliminating the threat of the North Korean regime. To that end, the allies have developed several operational plans (OPLANs, for short), focused primarily on repelling a major North Korean attack (OPLAN 5027). Allied forces, then, are postured to prevent the defeat of South Korea, and not to move north of the DMZ.

Two of the OPLANs, however, envisage contingencies that would draw allied forces into North Korea. In the case of a collapse of the Kim regime, OPLAN 529 would seek to secure weapons of mass destruction, handle refugee flows, and stabilize the peninsula by limiting the disruption of a North Korean implosion. There is also a rumored OPLAN 5015, which would entail preemptive strikes on North Korean nuclear and missile sites, and possibly command and control centers, in the likelihood of a conflict breaking out. These two plans, however, while envisioning conventional means of removing North Korea’s military threat, are largely reactive in nature.

Whether preemptive, preventive, or responsive, conventional military operations against North Korea face the same challenges. There are few options available to allied forces short of a massive and possibly protracted air and land campaign for destroying North Korea’s offensive capability and/or its regime. While boasting no significant air force, and with uncertain air defenses, the million-man North Korean army presents a potentially powerful force that would task all of South Korea’s capabilities, and in the case of a major war, could require the deployment of far more US forces than are kept on the peninsula or even the western Pacific region in peacetime.

Nor is destroying North Korean ground forces the only task that would require the full spectrum of US conventional force. Heavy bombing by in-theater or CONUS-based B-52, B-1, and B-2 US aircraft, along with sea-launched cruise missile strikes, would be unlikely completely to eliminate Kim’s nuclear program, which is wellprotected, often buried underground, and widely dispersed. Further, the North’s mobile launchers and missile stocks are often kept in caves or other hardened surroundings, not all of which would be destroyed by US or ROK attacks, nor can the allies have confidence they have identified all such sites. The Air Force does not have enough bunker-busting bombs to destroy both nuclear facilities and missile sites. Ultimately, to be assured of removing all offensive weapons, allied ground troops would have to secure all known and discovered sites in North Korea.

Pyongyang has also invested in thousands of artillery tubes aimed at Seoul; a massive, coordinated air and counter-artillery attack eventually would reduce the North’s artillery threat, but likely not before significant damage was inflicted on Seoul. Similarly, the North is reputed to have up to 100,000 special operations forces, who would be unleashed to wreak havoc inside South Korea; countering them with allied special operations forces and ground troops would likely entail significant military resources, thereby reducing the number of allied forces able to counter conventional North Korean forces.

In all these scenarios, the vast bulk of the land-based fighting would be done by the South Koreans, with US forces providing intelligence, air attack and support, and offshore fire. If a contingency developed comparatively slowly, the Pentagon would have time to generate and move more forces to Guam, Japan, and South Korea itself, increasing in-theater capacity to interoperate with South Korean forces. Yet it could take several weeks to mobilize and transport a significant enough US land-based force, and Pyongyang might decide to preempt any American move by striking before a larger US force could arrive, imposing significant casualties on allied forces and attempting to force another cease fire or a capitulation on the part of South Korea.



Removing the Kim regime through conventional means would be similarly difficult. As in the opening phase of the 2003 Iraq War, the United States might try to remove Kim Jong-un through a decapitation strike. Such an operation would be as risky and unlikely to succeed as the one that failed to catch Saddam Hussein, as the North Korean leadership undoubtedly has numerous hardened safe locations. Nor would US strikes be assured of removing enough of North Korea's leadership to isolate Kim and weaken his control on power. At a minimum, the United States would need far better intelligence about potential alternative power centers inside North Korea in order to have any confidence that a decapitation strike would destroy the regime's chain of command enough to affect the prosecution of any war.

Even should the allies attempt a conventional response to North Korean aggression, or if they undertook a preventive action, Kim's riposte could well be nuclear, chemical, or biological in nature. The North Korean regime has weaponized the latter two, and stands on the threshold of having a usable nuclear capability. Should Kim strike out with weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear ones, the pressure on Washington to utilize its nuclear capability, even at a tactical level, would be strong if not overpowering. Thus, a conventional conflict on the Korean peninsula might not stay conventional before the North was defeated.

Finally, the role of China should not be underestimated in any potential military scenario in Korea. Washington may desire and even plan for a limited conflict, but any threat to the continued existence of North Korea is more likely than not to induce Beijing to get involved. While Chinese President Xi Jinping has no love lost for Kim Jong-un, China appears unwilling to let North Korea disappear as a buffer state between it and the democratic, liberal, largely Western-leaning South Korea. It is thus entirely possible that Beijing would order Chinese forces into North Korea to secure Pyongyang and set up a puppet regime. That could put US and Chinese forces in close proximity, or put Chinese forces potentially at risk from US airstrikes in North Korea, either of which scenario would force Washington policymakers to make a difficult choice about how or whether to continue military operations.

The highest priority of the North Korean regime is survival, and to that end, it has developed a set of interlocking defensive and offensive capabilities that would challenge allied conventional military strategies. In the end, the North Korean regime would be unlikely to survive a campaign waged with the full conventional strength of the United States and South Korea, but it would seek to impose such significant physical costs on South Korea, Japan, and US territories, that Washington and Seoul would hesitate to wage preventive or preemptive war, and might even refrain from an overwhelming response to North Korean aggression. With the anticipated risks to South Korea, Japan, and US interests of any type of preventive or preemptive war, North Korea has shaped the pre-hostilities environment in a way that removes confidence in any reasonable conventional military option to remove the threat it poses, short of a major theater war.



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# A Brutal, but Reasonable, Response to North Korea

By Thomas Donnelly

Applying the adjective “reasonable” in a North Korean context is, well, not reasonable. It’s not that the Pyongyang regime is entirely irrational, but it is certainly “differently rational” in a way that is nearly impossible for consent-of-the-people democracies to comprehend. In imagining conventional military options to change the Kim regime or to eliminate its offensive capabilities—that is, to remove the threats North Korea poses to its neighbors, the East Asian balance of power and, now, the United States itself—“effectiveness” is a better measure. This is a case where brutality looks reasonable.

The first steps along this trail of analytical tears are to have a clear understanding of the American interests at stake. As Pyongyang’s nuclear capabilities have increased, so has the sentiment that these pose too difficult a problem and that the wiser policy is simply to walk away from our commitments in Korea. The Truman administration made that fatal mistake in 1950, putting at risk the security of East Asia that had been expensively bought from the Japanese. The solution to problems in US security cannot be to reimagine America and the world it has made.

The second step is to be equally clear about the nature of the Kim regime, and in particular to understand that its purpose is not simply to survive but to reunite the peninsula under its sole rule. The ideology of *juche*—the English translation as “self-reliance” does not do it justice—is as much a universal prescription as the natural-rights principles that drive America’s actions in the world. North Korea’s military has adopted a bristling offensive posture because it is meant to be an instrument of conquest; that it deters outsiders from intruding into an otherwise failed state is, to be sure, a benefit, but a secondary one. Like its Red Army mentors, the Korean People’s Army does not really draw a firm distinction between conventional and nuclear weapons.

Thus, it is not easy to distinguish between eliminating these offensive capabilities and regime change. No amount of air and missile defenses, nor counter-battery strikes, is likely to remove the threat. The defense of South Korea, of Japan, and of the United States will demand a large-scale attack—a counteroffensive to an attack from Pyongyang or a preemptive maneuver—to secure, at minimum, several hundred kilometers of North Korean territory plus various launch sites and elements of the North Korean WMD complex farther north. Timothy Bonds of RAND has estimated that even a minimal campaign of this kind would require an additional 162,000 American ground troops over and above the 40,000 or so already stationed in Korea. That number represents something like 80 percent of US Army and Marine Corps land combat power. The burden of the Navy and Air Force would be similar. To cross the 38th parallel is to cross the “regime change” threshold.

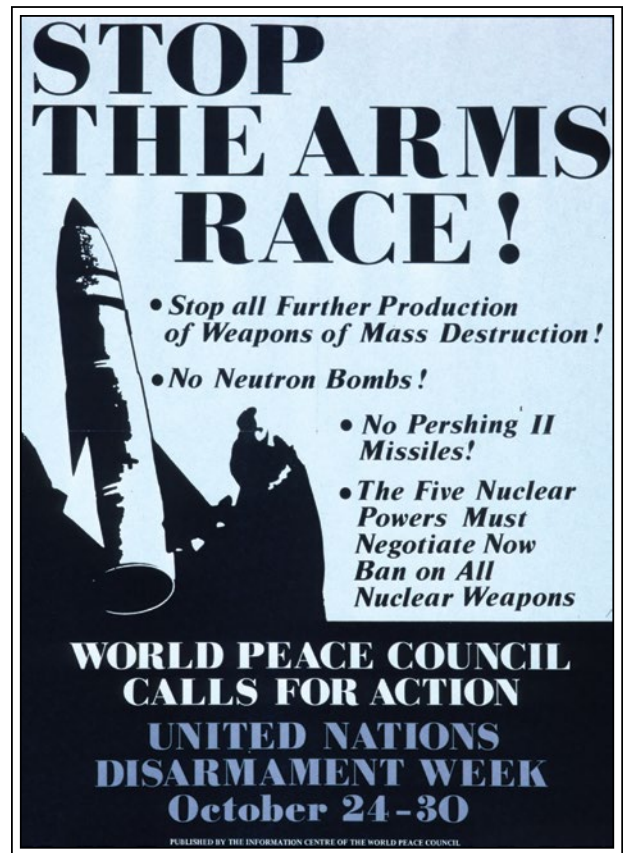


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This also would be a campaign fought under two much larger threats: of Kim's nukes and Chinese intervention. For the first, missile defenses may not be sufficient but they are profoundly necessary—and necessary in greater numbers and with better capabilities than are now available. Perhaps the worst blunder of the Obama-era Pentagon was to terminate the Airborne Laser program mounting a giant chemical laser inside a 747. To be sure, this was more science project than weapon development, but it offered a path to fielding a true “boost-phase intercept” missile defense system. The program's death was slow and painful, and it was killed within weeks of demonstrating its viability. For all its limitations, the ABL was the only realistic way to field a limited boost-phase defense in the time available.

Finally, there isn't a way to achieve US strategic goals for Korea or East Asia without confronting the China conundrum. The logic of October 1950 remains, but is in fact more compelling now: the emerging great-power competition between the United States and China is surely as important to the global balance of power as was the Cold War contest with the Soviet Union. Troublingly, there is reason to think that the Chinese economic model—for all its weaknesses—is more viable than was the Soviet one, and that America's position of primacy is shakier now than it was seven decades ago. Regime change in Pyongyang that leaves a pliable Chinese proxy in place of “Little Rocket Man” might seem like an improvement, but the benefits would be marginal and short-lived. And it certainly would not be worth the price of South Korean neutrality or the withdrawal of US forces from the peninsula.

In sum, we find ourselves in a Macbeth-like situation: “If it is done when 'tis done, 'twere well it were done quickly” and cold-bloodedly. A war on the peninsula would “trammel up” many consequences, and the more we might summon a “blow [that] might be-all and end-all”—or at least the most powerful possible—the better. A less literary but more historical frame of reference might well be the invasion of the Japanese home islands, in which case a “reasonable” outcome also seemed to exceed America's conventional military grasp.



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# Reasonable Conventional Options in a Second Korean War

By Miles Maochun Yu

While the world is abuzz about North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, it is Pyongyang's conventional capabilities that are not given sufficient attention. As mentions of a general war with North Korea are hardly absent on a daily basis, this indolence on seriously dealing with Kim's conventional forces is alarmingly dangerous, because, despite the global focus on Kim's nascent nuclear weapons and missile programs, the actual fighting will remain overwhelmingly conventional, primarily because Kim knows that his strength lies preponderantly in his conventional capabilities, not nuclear or thermonuclear ones.

What are then the reasonable conventional military options that could remove North Korea's offensive capability?

First, the North Korean regime is the world's most militaristic state with the whole nation mobilized for warfighting. Unlike other communist states, most notably China, where the Communist Party controls the military, the military in North Korea, collectively known as the Korean People's Army [KPA], exerts total control of all key aspects of the state and society guided by a sweeping cardinal principle called Songun ("Military First"). As a result, North Korea's economy is severely tilted toward the military, without any meaningfully productive economic sectors to supply strategic provisions for the gigantic war machine, whose mere existence is heavily dependent on China for strategic supplies, from grain, oil, and meats, to financial services and trade. Therefore, the first phase of debilitating North Korea's conventional capabilities is already being ably implemented by the international community led by the Trump administration, as President Trump has been able to reason, cajole, and threaten the recalcitrant Chinese government to essentially stop aiding the Pyongyang regime, the first American president who is succeeding in doing so in a quarter of a century. As of now, the effect has been devastating to North Korea's war machine. A hungry army cannot fight a winning war.

Second, North Korea's conventional capabilities have numerical formidability with significant technological inferiority, which can be exploited. Currently, roughly a quarter of North Korea's entire population are armed and regimented, with 1.1 million on active duty (4th largest in the world) and nearly six million in reserve force (1st in the world). The Korean People's Army operates 4,100 tanks, 2,100 APCs, 8,500 long-range artillery pieces and more than 5,000 rocket launchers, 60-plus submarines, more than 11,000 AAA guns and an equal number of shoulder-launched missiles, over 500 naval warships, and more than 800 combat aircraft, all of which will wreak havoc on Seoul and other South Korean metropolises.

But much of the conventional hardware is obsolete, some being of World War II vintage or of mishmash design and parts specifications. The KPA's air power is severely outgunned by the United States and its allies in the region. Its navy consists of mostly smaller craft with limited fire power, mostly a coastal defense marine force, with an awkward command structure that renders mutual reinforcement between its East



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and West coast fleets essentially meaningless. With limited force projection (especially air and sea lifts) capabilities, the KPA can be attacked from frontlines of our allies' choosing, in places where its weakest links exist. Without the strategic depth that China or Russia used to provide, and with the KPA's preponderant and concentrated deployment of capabilities along the 38th Parallel DMZ region, North Korea's military is vulnerable to attacks from its rear, coastal lines, and potentially from the air where the KPA's AAA and SAM air defense could still be formidable but not entirely insurmountable.

Third, our primary strategic concern should be with the KPA's asymmetrical capabilities in a conventional war. Aware of its technological inferiority in comparison with the militaries of its arch enemies, the North Korean regime has developed formidable asymmetrical capabilities that could wreak havoc on South Korea, Japan, and even the United States. At present, North Korea has the world's largest special force, with an astonishing 200,000 personnel, capable of conducting large-scale sabotage, infiltration, industrial espionage, assassination, and political and psychological warfare against the South and beyond. North Korea also has a good cyber and computer education system that has supplied a sizable cyber army which has become the world's largest state-sponsored bank robber by stealing about \$1 billion each year from various foreign banks. In addition, the KPA also operates many internationally banned programs including chemical and biological weapons, and antipersonnel lasers. It has also developed electromagnetic pulse bomb and GPS jammer capabilities that could disable our allies' tactical communication and guidance systems. The United States and its allies have the advanced technology to deal with these asymmetrical threats, but we must take them more seriously with sufficient investment in countermeasures.

Fourth, North Korea's command and control system is extremely centralized, which makes it vulnerable to decapitation operations. Such highly rigid military command stifles field commanders' flexibility in adapting to battlefield situations without fear of being shot by its dictator at the very top. In other words, the KPA's command and control could be paralyzed and North Korea's military may well share the same fate as the quick collapse of Saddam Hussein's military command system once the first shots are fired and its top commanding authority is paralyzed.



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# Is North Korea's Threat Unacceptable?

By Angelo M. Codevilla

The question, “Are both North Korean possession of nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles and the threat of a North Korean conventional strike on Seoul unacceptable risks in dealing with Kim Jong-un?” is phrased badly. The US government has accepted, accepts, and gives no sign of ceasing to accept 1) North Korea’s capacity to deliver nuclear warheads onto US soil, as well as to devastate Seoul. North Korea developed these capabilities and weapons within the context and constraints of basic US policy, which is not about to change; 2) North Korea is, as ever, a pawn of China (and of the USSR/Russia to a lesser extent). North Korea is as unimportant in and of itself as it was in 1950. But, because it is a pawn, the US government has proved incompetent in dealing with it.

North Korea survived 1950 because the US government did not want to risk “a wider war.” To avoid trouble with its patrons, the United States did not use any of the next four decades’ countless opportunities to throttle and starve it. Instead, as the little monster started building nuclear weapons and missiles, the United States fed it. Our “best and brightest” also tailored America’s missile defense system against North Korea to be marginal, because to have done more would have made it capable of defending against China and Russia. Hence, a tiny semi-starved country is on the cusp of overwhelming everything we’ve got by way of missile defense, built at a cost of some \$80 billion. North Korea’s relatively cheap missiles are on track to overwhelm our ill-conceived, prohibitively expensive Alaska and California-based interceptors intended as token defenses of US soil. Our excellent interceptors aboard AEGIS ships are hobbled in their defense of US troops and allies in the region because their information systems must wait for missiles and warheads to come over the horizon. The missile defense supplemental pending in Congress adds to these programs without fixing their basic problems.

But the prospect of North Korean ordnance exploding on our soil should not trouble our sleep. The Kim regime built these weapons

## POLL: If force is used, what is the most likely US military response to North Korean nuclear threats?

- ☐ Symbolic launches of US missiles and air force overflights into North Korean airspace
- ☐ A blockade of North Korea’s coasts enforced by the US Navy
- ☐ The systematic shooting down of future North Korean missile launches
- ☐ Commando raids into North Korea to neutralize the North Korean leadership
- ☐ A massive preemptive strike to take out all of North Korea’s nuclear and conventional weapons aimed at Seoul

principally to deter and blackmail Americans and our Pacific allies, not to kill them. Preserving the regime is their purpose. No one doubts that they would negate that purpose the moment they were used.

Nevertheless, North Korea's demonstration of America's incompetence is a catastrophe of historic proportions because it is unraveling three generations of Pax Americana in the Pacific. North Korea's weapons speak loudly with facts what China suggests ever more persuasively to the region's nations: If the Americans can't protect themselves against North Korea, never mind against us, what makes you think they can protect you at all? China's strategy does not aim at war. Rather, it tries to anticipate and preclude it by gaining ever more unassailable advantages.

Our options are straightforward: to act militarily in the Western Pacific more or less as we have, or, recognizing what China's strategy—with North Korea's help—has done, is doing, and will do to us, to build such defenses for ourselves and for our allies as to moot that strategy. This will take deeds, including but not limited to: imposing on North Korea a secondary trade embargo plus a naval blockade, fortifying Taiwan, and building a US missile defense worthy of the name. The choice is not whether we declare what is being done to us as unacceptable. It is whether we are willing to change our ways enough to stop it.

It is as if someone were to ask a sufferer from type 2 diabetes whether his troubles are unacceptable. Since the disease follows mostly from the excess of food and the dearth of exercise, the real question is whether he will maintain his lifestyle, or reverse it.



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# How to Approach the North Korean Threat

By Josef Joffe

Two basic truths for starters. First, no nuclear power has ever attacked another. Second, “de-proliferation” has only worked in countries that fulfilled one of three conditions, which North Korea has not.

- A. The country is too weak to withstand a conventional assault. This is the case of Libya, which agreed in December of 2003 to terminate its quest for weapons of mass destruction. Recall that the United States had ended Iraq’s program by invasion and victory in the same year. Its leverage at that point was at a maximum.
- B. The country faces no existential threats from strong neighbors, at least not those that can be countered by nuclear weapons. This is the case of South Africa, which in 1989 decided to scrap its rudimentary force. “Pretoria saw that the solution to South Africa’s problems lay in the political rather than the military arena and that the nuclear deterrent, along with strategic ambiguity, was becoming a burden rather than a benefit.”<sup>1</sup>
- C. The country is part or profiteer of a powerful security system. This is the case of NATO member Germany, which began to dismantle its complete fuel-cycle (a theoretical weapons option) after the end of the Cold War. It also pertains to nonmember Sweden huddling under the umbrella provided courtesy of NATO.

None of these conditions fits North Korea. It lives in a high-threat neighborhood surrounded by enemies (though of its own making) and three nuclear powers in the wings: the United States, China, and Russia. The same holds for Iran, whence we may surmise that neither Pyongyang nor Tehran will de-proliferate, whatever the carrots or the sticks.

North Korea has pocketed all the benefits delivered since the days of the Clinton administration. Iran has signed the JCPOA, but is using the breather to perfect weaponization and missile technology. Both nations have learned that nobody has ever attacked a nuclear-armed state. To boot, both have vast conventional potentials whose defeat requires a massive investment of force. The incalculable costs, including a wider conflagration, have stayed the hands of Israel and the United States in their face-off with Iran. That kind of deterrence also weighs on the United States as it seems to ponder preemption against Pyongyang.

North Korea has yet another iron in the fire, which is China. Beijing will not stand by idly if the United States strikes at North Korea (recall China’s entry into the Korean War when US forces approached the Yalu River border). War followed by the fall of the House of Kim evokes two nightmares. One is Korea’s reunification under Seoul’s and Washington’s auspices. In due time, this would confront China with a mighty American ally on its doorstep. So count on Beijing to protect North Korea from the worst.

The other nightmare is the collapse of North Korea under the pressure of murderous sanctions. Though Beijing, at the Security Council in August, agreed to harshest-ever measures, it will not follow through to the point where million-fold misery might unleash millions of refugees into China. In short, China is the guarantor of the status quo, including Pyongyang’s nuclear possessions and the eventual perfection of an intercontinental nuclear strike force.

Kim Jong-un may be mad, but he is not stupid; nor were his dynastic ancestors, Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. To give up the bomb is to give up the most precious chips in the game of states: prestige, attention, and security, plus a wondrous blackmail potential that had produced so many material benefits in the past. Kim also knows a few more things.



China underwrites his regime's life insurance. South Korea, its capital under the gun of some 12,000 artillery pieces and 2,300 rocket launchers, will continue to waver between clenched fists and friendly grimaces. Japan fears war more than North Korean nukes. So do the other players in East Asia. And so, if truth be told, does the United States. After all, three US presidents before No. 45 have vowed to put their missiles where their mouths were. Why should Donald ("Fire and Fury") Trump be different? Kim, like his forefathers, HAS measured the "correlation of forces" and found it tilted against the United States.

A military option is as unlikely as it was in the Cold War and in the confrontation with Iran that segued into the JCPOA. The deal, at best, only slowed the country's nuclearization. So what are the remaining options? They are as familiar as they are humdrum: deterrence, defense, and containment.

If the United States wants to forestall counter-proliferation in South Korea and Japan, it will have to keep deterrence alive by maintaining credible forces in place. Offshore, deterrence is embodied in a mighty armada. In Japan and South Korea, deterrence must be served as always: with respectively 38,000 and 24,000 US troops. Containment rests on the assurance of allies, which goes beyond soldiers in place, and requires a president who is decisive, reliable, and responsible—a guarantor of stability, not uncontrollable chaos.

Defense spells "missile defense" with three systems. THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) is already in place in South Korea. It shoots down medium and intermediate-range missiles in the descent or reentry phase. The sea-based Aegis system shoots down missiles in midcourse. So does GMD (Ground-Based Midcourse Defense), currently located in Alaska and Vandenberg AFB in California.

The technology is far from perfect, but Kim's arsenal is far less so, implying that time is still on the United States' side, allowing for diplomacy and sanctions to prove their worth. Above all, the rule is to wield a big stick while talking wisely. Make only those threats you are willing to execute. Preemptive war is not one of them.

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1 J. W. de Villiers, Roger Jardine, and Mitchell Reiss, "Why South Africa Gave Up the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 1993.



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# Detering Kim Jong-un's North Korea

By Peter Mansoor

Kim Jong-un's goal is to survive and pass his regime on intact to a successor, presumably a yet-to-be-born son. He has relentlessly pursued this goal by assassinating would-be competitors to power in fairly creative ways, such as blasting his uncle apart with an antiaircraft gun and having his halfbrother poisoned with a nerve agent. He has learned the lesson of Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Muammar Qaddafi's Libya: Survival comes not from the barrel of a gun, but from a nuclear-tipped missile capable of killing hundreds of thousands of people, preferably Americans, with the push of a button. As a charter member of the "Axis of Evil," Kim Jong-un understands all too well that regime change is only a moment away. To avert this unwanted future he holds South Korean, Japanese, and soon American cities hostage with hundreds of artillery tubes and now missile-delivered hydrogen bombs.

Kim Jong-un is not stupid or suicidal. Absent an existential threat he will hold his fire, provoking his enemies with missile and nuclear tests but not providing them a *casus belli*. He may miscalculate and cross an unseen Trump administration red line, but not purposefully. He knows that war means the end of his regime and perhaps as well the extinction of the North Korean people.

Two-thirds of the American public opposes launching a preventive strike against North Korea, and world opinion is overwhelmingly opposed. If it were to strike North Korea without sufficient provocation, the Trump administration would sacrifice public support and international goodwill, much as the Bush administration did by invading Iraq without international backing in 2003. A first strike may not succeed in destroying all of North Korea's missiles or nuclear weapons, even one of which could wipe out Seoul, Tokyo, or Seattle. A preventive strike would be the proverbial roll of the iron dice, resulting in uncertain outcomes and unintended consequences.

Fortunately, the US national missile defense system, composed of ground-based interceptors based in Alaska and California, the ship-based Aegis ballistic missile defense system, the theater-based Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system based in South Korea and Guam, and shorter range antiballistic missile systems such as the Patriot PAC-3, will in time grow to the point where it can reliably intercept North Korean missiles headed for US and allied territory. Despite criticism that ground-based interceptors have succeeded in only nine of seventeen tests since 1999, the most recent test of the system this year was successful. As the technology matures, the reliability of the system will improve, and with it the ability of the United States and its allies to defend against a North Korean missile attack.

As for the threat of a conventional artillery bombardment of Seoul, the South Korean government should take a page out of Israel's playbook and develop an "Iron Dome" system to protect the capital. Effective defenses will give the United States and South Korea the latitude to wait for Kim Jong-un to fire the first shot in any conflict. Missile and artillery defenses can parry the blow, positioning the United States and its allies, with international backing, to consign Kim Jong-un and his regime to the dustbin of history.



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# North Korea: Diplomacy or Military Solution?

By Barry Strauss

North Korea is not going to give up its nuclear weapons short of war. Diplomacy, however, can improve the terms of an eventual deal. A nuclear-armed North Korea is a frightening thought, but we are probably past the point where a military solution is bearable.

It's hard to believe that the United States or any country has the military wizardry needed to take out, cleanly and without massive casualties, North Korea's nuclear weapons or its missiles or its artillery aimed at Seoul, a metropolitan area of twenty-four million people. Yours truly is no scientist, however, and I might be wrong. In that case, the United States should be willing to take out both sets of weapons, but only after engaging in the following actions. These actions are also our best options in case I am right about the grim results of an attempt to take North Korea's terrible weapons out.

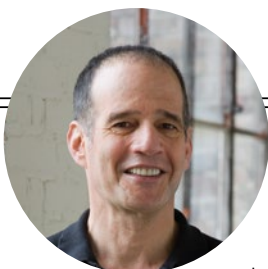
The actions are:

1. Continue to consult with our regional allies, especially Japan and South Korea.
2. Continue to tighten sanctions, as the Trump administration has been doing.
3. Do everything we can to cut off North Korea's access to financing, whether that financing comes through legitimate or illegitimate channels.
4. Continue the current campaign to close down North Korean diplomatic and business activities around the world.
5. Step up cyber sabotage against North Korea.
6. Increase pressure on China to cut trade ties with North Korea.
7. Do everything possible—if anything is possible—to support opposition to Kim Jong-un within North Korea, particularly opposition within the elite.
8. Signal both North Korea and China that our goal is not to put North Korea out of business or to reunite the Korean peninsula (desirable as that might be), but merely to stop North Korea's nuclear program or its proliferation to North Korea's allies and business partners abroad.
9. Build up our antimissile defenses both for the United States and US territories abroad and for our allies in Asia.
10. Build up US conventional forces in East Asia.

These measures will squeeze North Korea but they won't achieve the desired goal of denuclearization. In fact, nothing short of war is liable to achieve that goal. And that's a terrible conclusion, because North Korea will not necessarily behave like a conservative, responsible party, or a "satiated power," as Bismarck claimed Germany was after 1871, if it is allowed to survive as a nuclear state. In fact, it is likely to proliferate nuclear weapons abroad, encourage further opposition to the United States, engender the nuclearization of Japan and South Korea, and maybe even engage in its long-term aim of invading South Korea. One fears that, as a

dictator, Kim Jong-un will be more like Mussolini or Hitler than Franco—that is, a man given to risktaking and glory seeking rather than to standing pat behind his nation's borders.

But at least by putting the squeeze on him diplomatically we might be in a position to negotiate better terms. Of course, as I said at the outset, I'm no expert on the weapons involved. If I am wrong and if we are indeed able to take out North Korea's weapons without massive casualties, then, and only after taking the steps above, the United States should do so.



**BARRY STRAUSS** is a military historian with a focus on ancient Greece and Rome. His latest book, *The Death of Caesar: The Story of History's Most Famous Assassination* (Simon & Schuster, March 2015), has been hailed as "clear and compelling" by *TIME* and received three starred reviews from book journals (*Kirkus*, *Library Journal*, *Shelf Awareness*). His *Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar and the Genius of Leadership* (Simon & Schuster, May 2012), was named one of the best books of 2012 by Bloomberg.



# Annihilate the North Korea Threat: Possible Options

By Miles Maochun Yu

The very fact that the DPRK has nuclear weapons with formidable conventional strike capabilities is unacceptable. Because of this, in dealing with Kim Jong-un, the risks are not unacceptable and they will have to be factored into any strategic and contingency plans.

However, accepting such risks with alacrity does not necessarily mean that a direct head-on kinetic confrontation with North Korea in a catastrophic conventional and nuclear shoot-out should be the only option.

President Donald Trump has said that Kim Jong-un is “on a suicide mission.” To deal with Kim as a suicide bomber with nuclear warheads strapped to his chest and multiple deadly conventional weapons in his hands, it would be similarly suicidal to confront him head-on in a near-distance shoot-out as the first and only option. Unless all other possible means are exhausted, you might be able to kill him in a direct and head-on confrontation, but you may also destroy, or at least severely harm, yourself along the way as nuclear annihilation is mutually assured.

Assuming assassination of Kim is an impossible option, what are other possible options?

First, we should pay more attention to the DPRK’s conventional capabilities, which are far more formidable and worrisome than its nuclear arsenal as it is being developed. Currently, roughly a quarter of North Korea’s entire population are armed and regimented, with 1.1 million on active duty (4th largest in the world) and nearly six million in reserve force (1st in the world). The Korean People’s Army (KPA) operates 4,100 tanks, 2,100 APCs (armored personnel carriers), 8,500 long-range artillery pieces and more than 5,000 rocket launchers, 60-plus submarines, more than 11,000 AAA (antiaircraft artillery) guns, an equal number of shoulder-launched missiles, over 500 naval warships, and more than 800 combat aircraft, all of which will wreak havoc to Seoul and other South Korean metropolises.

Some of these conventional weapons may be outdated but the KPA has also developed impressive cyber warfare, antipersonnel laser, electromagnetic pulse bomb, and GPS jammer capabilities.

Second, operating such an enormous war machine on such a massive scale needs fuel, which is in short supply in the DPRK. Therefore, at the top of America’s economic warfare policy agenda against North Korea should be an overwhelming focus on instituting an oil embargo and destroying the DPRK’s strategic oil reserve.

Third, make regime change a top priority and the ultimate objective, in close association with a South Korea-led national unification. It was a big mistake for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to have promised the Chinese that regime change in Pyongyang would never be America’s objective in dealing with Kim Jong-un. Because it’s none of Beijing’s or Washington’s business, as to whether or not to change the Pyongyang regime. South Korea is the only legitimate government that could initiate and lead a regime change in Pyongyang, aided by its allies, through a variety of means—not just a military invasion of the DPRK—such as economic integration, psychological warfare, and cultural and religious infiltration.

Fourth, use economic and trade embargoes against the DPRK as strategic leverage to achieve the Trump administration’s announced economic program, i.e., to punish China for its predatory economic and trade warfare against the United States. The North Korean problem shares a symbiosis with China’s strategic view toward the United States. China has always used the North Korean nuclear issue to play the nuclear North Korea card in order to gain leverage against Washington on a variety of larger issues. President Trump is the

first American leader to have turned the tables on Beijing and threaten China with a complete cutoff of trade with the communist autocrats in Beijing if it continues to aid furtively the Pyongyang regime, in violation of China's own vows at the UN. Such a hardball approach seems to be working as Beijing only reacts to credible threats. POTUS should carry this approach out and fulfill his campaign promise to the American people and get a better deal with China on trade and economic relationship.



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# The Need for Missile Defense

By Victor Davis Hanson

America's great advantage when it entered world affairs after the Civil War was that its distance from Europe and Asia ensured that it was virtually immune from large seaborne invasions.

The Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans proved far better barriers than even the forests and mountain ranges of Europe. At twenty-eight years old, Abraham Lincoln succinctly summed up America's natural invincibility in his famous Lyceum Address of January 27, 1838: "All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years."

In an age before air power, missiles, and napalm, Lincoln understood that no great power had the expeditionary power to invade and hold the vast North American continent.

So Americans began to assume that while they might fight frequently abroad and send expeditionary armies and naval forces around the globe, the fight would never come to them at home. America's security cocoon was reinforced after the mid-nineteenth century when there was no longer any danger from either a neighboring Canada or Mexico.

The rare times in our history that enemies breached our natural defenses and hit our cities caused national hysteria—and yet never approached the magnitude of a serious invasion.

The small British expeditionary army that left the West Indies to burn the White House in August 1814 was under orders not to venture inland, but to conduct raids of terror and then leave. The Japanese never managed a serious attack. Their pathetic efforts at launching armed balloons to hit the west coast or to shell shoreline facilities by submarines inflicted almost no damage. Such pinpricks only further reminded the world of innate US defensive advantages.

Hitler talked grandly of a long-range, multiengine "Amerika" bomber that could hit US cities. But the weapon remained the stuff of fantasy. German U-boats did terrible damage to US freighters off the East Coast in early and mid-1942. Yet they never were, nor could have been, the vanguard of a German expeditionary attack. Equally impotent were Nazi attempts to send terrorist teams to disrupt US industry.

Even during the Civil War, the Union remained impervious to sustained attack on most of its homeland by either foreign or Confederate troops. The South's planned and actual incursions into Northern territory caused temporary panic—such as Albert Sidney Johnston's envisioned advance beyond Tennessee that failed at Shiloh, Robert E. Lee's march into Pennsylvania that was turned at Gettysburg, and Jubal Early's audacious attempt to sprint into Washington. But these Confederate efforts were never designed to take and hold vast Union cities.

The September 11, 2001, attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center killed thousands, destroyed and damaged iconic buildings, and sought to undermine US resolve. But again, the terrorist operations were not part of a sustainable war aimed at destroying the US mainland.

Only by the 1950s during the Cold War did the Soviet Union for the first time in US history achieve the potential to destroy the US homeland. But that aim was itself checked by the doctrine of mutually assured destruction. MAD ensured that any first-strike effort against American cities and bases would result in the total destruction of the Soviet Union itself by the American nuclear arsenal.

When “Red” China went nuclear in 1964, there were worries that Mao was an early Kim Jong-un-like figure—unhinged and not subject to deterrence. Thus he was feared for being capable of sending his small arsenal of nuclear-tipped missiles against the West Coast without worries of an overwhelmingly destructive US counterstrike. In fact, Mao, like Stalin had earlier, soon proved rational enough, with no desire to lose a Beijing or Shanghai in order to take out San Francisco, in an age before serious missile defense.

It was said that Ronald Reagan “broke” the Soviet Union with his arms buildup and vision of a space-based missile defense system (the Strategic Defense Initiative, dubbed “Star Wars” by its critics). Such a promised escalation and expense challenged the ossified Russian economy to match it in kind, which it could not do, even if it had acquired the necessary commensurate technological know-how.

In sum, America has grown accustomed to believing that most foreign powers could never bring the war home to our shores—and the few who could accepted that it would be too insane to try.

Yet now, the United States is in quite new strategic territory.

Reagan’s envisioned SDI was never seriously pursued—given that it was often caricatured as a “hoax” and “destabilizing” by critics such as the Democratic Party’s 1984 presidential nominee Senator Walter Mondale. Subsequent liberal administrations predictably frowned upon missile defense. They felt that such a successful first-strike deterrent might make nuclear war more likely; or they wanted the money spent on domestic programs; or they were uneasy with ensuring that the United States achieved preeminent global strategic dominance.

The result was that missile defense systems during the Clinton and Obama administrations were either cut back or curtailed entirely. Recall Clinton Defense Secretary William Perry’s dismissal that there was never a need for missile defense to deter a rogue nation like North Korea: “We do not need a national missile defense system because . . . no rogue nation has ICBMs . . . and if these powers should ever pose a threat, our ability to retaliate with an overwhelming nuclear response will serve as a deterrent.” North Korea supposedly has both thermonuclear weapons and ICBMs, and claims that it is not at all deterred by the specter of nuclear war. And Barack Obama’s infamous hot mic exchange in Seoul, South Korea, with outgoing Russian president Dmitri Medvedev seemed to promise an end to Eastern European–American missile defense deployment.

Here is their exchange:

President Obama: “On all these issues, but particularly missile defense, this, this can be solved but it’s important for him to give me space.”

President Medvedev: “Yeah, I understand. I understand your message about space. Space for you . . .”

President Obama: “This is my last election. After my election I have more flexibility.”

President Medvedev: “I understand. I will transmit this information to Vladimir, and I stand with you.”

Current existing missile defense systems, both short and long range, are of little value in countering a massive Russian strike. And they offer only marginal assurance that a Chinese or Pakistani missile attack could be partly averted.

We have been able to live with these realities for some time, thinking that communist and Islamist adversaries ascribe to the Cold War MAD doctrine. But what is new and terrifying is the emergence of two rogue powers, North Korea and Iran—one nuclear and the other soon to be. Both deliberately seek, at least rhetorically, to ignore MAD reasoning.

Accordingly, both dictatorships have sent unhinged assurances that counterstrike losses on their respective homelands would be well worth vaporizing a Western state or major US city. Kim Jung-un has said: “Let’s reduce the U.S. mainland to ashes and darkness”—while Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has taken aim at our ally, Israel: “The use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything.”



Past diplomatic efforts to stop their nuclear proliferation have proved futile and may have even accelerated the progress of their nuclear acquisition. Certainly, their thuggish leaders learned from the fates of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya that losing a nuclear weapons program could be tantamount to losing their lives.

We should assume that barring some sort of new Manhattan Project or national defense commitment analogous to the gargantuan B-29 effort during World War II, the United States will be unable to assure its population of complete safety against a volley of half a dozen North Korean or Iranian intercontinental thermonuclear weapons.

That vulnerability to nuclear attack is evident in the past inability of both the Obama and Trump administrations to fashion a credible threat to such rogue nations—for fear we might well lose an overseas base or even a major city in the effort. Both presidents in quite different fashion alluded to the likely destruction of North Korea should it launch a nuclear weapon at the US homeland or against our allies, but without being sure that such a rhetorical threat would ever deter a seemingly irrational Kim Jong-un. Indeed, we will soon face a far greater likelihood that a nuclear North Korea or Iran will use all of its assets against America than Russia or China would ever consider using one of its nuclear missiles.

Such existential vulnerability is especially unsettling to America. The crisis is not just that our diplomacy is hamstrung and our military options limited. Our role as the leader of the world is likewise diminished.

We can already see an emerging bifurcation with South Korea. Kim Jong-un was able to separate once identical US and South Korean strategic agendas by announcing an ability to hit a US city. For the first time in the nearly seventy-year history of Seoul and Washington, South Korea cannot demand absolute deference in our joint defense posture—given its past unique vulnerability to North Korean attack. Given its new exposure, America now must prioritize its own home defense over its former commitment to its ally South Korea, which in the past was alone vulnerable to a devastating North Korean conventional or nuclear attack.

As Kim Jong-un saw, the specter of incinerating San Diego or flattening Portland has scrambled many previous allied assumptions. Imagine also that an Iranian nuclear-tipped missile fleet would cause the same disruption between European nations and the United States over their differing degrees of vulnerability to an Iranian nuclear first strike. Just as North Korea's arsenal has unsettled the Japanese-South Korean-Taiwanese-American strategic axis, so too would a nuclear Iran create dozens of contradictory strategic positions out of NATO's presently shared mutual defense posture.

Missile defense should no longer be written off as a Strangelove fantasy. Rather, it should be seen as the only way in the near future of diminishing the dangers of nuclear blackmail from a Kim Jong-un and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—or other rogue nuclear nations to come.



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He has been a commentator on modern warfare and contemporary politics for various media outlets. He was a professor of classics at California State University-Fresno, and has been a visiting professor at Hillsdale College since 2004. Hanson was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2007 by President George W. Bush. Hanson is also a farmer (growing raisin grapes on a family farm in Selma, California) and a critic of social trends related to farming and agrarianism, and is author of over 18 books.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the reasonable conventional military options, if any, that could remove North Korea's offensive capability or its regime?
2. What, if anything, does the Korean War teach us about likely outside interventions in any war on the Korean peninsula?
3. Does Russia have any significant role to play in defusing the North Korean crisis? If not, why?
4. How do Japanese/South Korean/American conventional assets stack up against those of North Korea?
5. What advantages does China enjoy in empowering some three decades of North Korean rogue behavior?

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The State of US Naval Readiness



## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## Strategika

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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