

North Korea: Fire and Fury

They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.. This thinly veiled [threat of nuclear annihilation](#) from Donald Trump was the latest round in the trading of insults between the US and North Korean regime.

It's not just mere insults being traded, in their game of one-upmanship the North Koreans [fire missiles over Japan](#) and the Americans [fly bomber squadrons](#) along the North's coast.

This 'sleepwalk' to war is nothing more than a battle to maintain global hegemony but it would be ordinary Koreans paying the heaviest price. Their true interests lie in a united Korea based on democratic economic control.

Dress rehearsal for war



Kim Jong Un supervises missile launch

This latest confrontation over North Korea's Nuclear missile programme is another stage in the phoney war between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the US since the armistice in 1953.

PJ Crowley, Former US Assistant Secretary of State, [summed it up](#) for the BBC:

"The end of the Korean War in 1953 technically represented a cessation of hostilities between the two sides. But in reality there has been open hostility ever since."

Every year the US, which still has [nearly 30,000 troops](#) on the peninsula, and South Korea have held large military exercises [which include](#):

"... surgical strikes against North Korea's nuclear, missile and command and control facilities. It also specifically calls for "decapitation" raids by Special Forces to neutralize North Korea's senior leadership"

As John Delury, professor at Seoul's Yonsei University, [observed](#) on these exercises:

"The US and South Korea can call the joint exercises defensive and regular as much as they want, but it's not defensive if you're sitting in Pyongyang."

Given that one of the participants in these exercises is the world's most powerful military, the reaction of the North Korean regime is perhaps unsurprising, [calling them](#) a dress rehearsal for war.

Nuclear weapons, a regime insurance policy

Contrary to the utterances of figures such as Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un is not some madman [begging for war](#). The Global Times [detailed the regime's motivation](#) of self-preservation:

"In spite of their progress, Pyongyang is unlikely to be bold enough to preemptively attack the US and its allies. This would be nothing more than suicide. It also runs contrary to the true purpose of North Korea's missile research - to extend the life of its regime."

The North Korean dictatorship has witnessed the fate of other regimes opposed to US interests. In particular the overthrow of Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Colonel Gaddafi. PJ Crowley writing in the same article above outlined those lessons learnt by North Korea from the US' overthrow of the two dictators:

"First, the removals of Saddam Hussein by the Bush administration and Muammar Gaddafi by the Obama administration - two leaders who contemplated nuclear weapons but didn't actually build them - led Pyongyang to a simple conclusion: an actual nuclear capability is the ultimate regime insurance policy."

Sleepwalk into war



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

The missile and nuclear advances made by North Korea has brought into range important bases such as Guam and civilian areas of the US mainland. Richard Parker, an American journalist in an analysis for the Politico Magazine, [wrote](#):

"If Kim can credibly threaten Guam, he threatens the United States' ability to fight all but a short war on the Korean Peninsula—not to mention the U.S.'s ability to fight another

major war elsewhere. As threats go, this one is surprisingly precise, credible and strategic."

Basically the problem with the missile programmes of smaller rivals, such as North Korea and Iran, is that it gives them the ability to disrupt pre-emptive strikes by the US. So while military action may seem to be counter productive and risky but it is compelled by geopolitical interests.

This means that the window of opportunity for regime change is narrowing, giving a powerful motive for a pre-emptive military action by the US.

However there are countervailing pressures against war. The civilian cost could be huge given that the South Korean capital Seoul is just 55km from North's artillery arsenal and there are military facilities in and around the North's capital, Pyongyang.

The economic impact would be global, [Reuters quoted economists](#) Gareth Leather and Krystal Tan:

"South Korea is heavily integrated into regional and global manufacturing supply-chains, which would be severely disrupted in the event of a major military conflict."

There is also the real risk of the conflict widening. It is probable that China would intervene in the event of Kim Jong-un's regime falling to prevent both a US push to its border and the humanitarian fall-out.

In light of these risks some policy makers are contemplating living with a nuclear North Korea but freezing their development. Lawrence Korb, a former US assistant secretary of defence, suggested direct talks with the North with an offer to formally end the Korean war, [also added](#):

"Eventually that's how you're going to settle this. You're going to have to recognise North Korea as a nuclear power - you want to stop it where they are, and guarantee their sovereignty,"

However, proposals from China and Russia of a '[double suspension](#)', suspending the North's

nuclear programme and the US' and South Korea's military activities, have been rejected out of hand.

The current stand off between North Korea and the US is clearly not sustainable. The US is tries to ratchet up the pressure with imposing ever tougher sanctions. But for the regime self survival outweighs the pain of sanctions all they do is delay the outcome - Something will have to give...

The deteriorating relations between North Korea and the US has raised fears of the crisis spilling over into conflict, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres [warned that](#), We must not sleepwalk our way into war..

Risks of regime change



North Korean farm

Regime change carries risks of the economic collapse of the North, the impact of which would spill over into the South.

A combination of regime priorities, bureaucratic mismanagement and sanctions has throttled economic development in North Korea. Its [GDP at \\$28 billion](#) (2013 est.) is barely above the [levels of the late 80s](#) and is dwarfed by South Korea's [\\$1.411 trillion](#) (2016 est.).

Comparing GDP per capita throws the differences between north and south into even sharper relief. In the South it's at \$36,900 (2015 est.) compared to the North's paltry \$1,700 (2015 est.).

The regime's diversion of resources into military expenditure means that North Korean industry

has suffered years of under investment. Its poor state means that it would collapse in the face of direct competition from the south.

The agricultural sector, which employs nearly 40% of the workforce is inefficient, labour intensive and held back by fuel and farm machinery shortages.

This shows the scale of the problem if the US did manage to overthrow Kim Jong-un. The rebuilding of North Korea would consume enormous sums.

South Korea is not the West Germany of 1990 that absorbed the east, it does not have the resources to integrate the North. China is quite right in warning of a humanitarian disaster in the event of regime change but It would also jeopardise the stability of South Korea.

Harness the resources of a united Korea

Neither the North Korean regime or US capitalism are the slightest bit interested that it would be ordinary Koreans paying the price in the event of war.

The regime in the north is only concerned in protecting its privileged and parasitic position. The south is led by a supine and corrupt elite reliant on the US for protection. For the US, South Korea is a useful tool in its battle to maintain its global hegemony and to contain a rising China.

But behind all this geopolitical jostling is a colossal waste of the talents of the Korean people.

The region is fantastically rich in natural resources and the working classes of both North and South Korea excel in many branches of technology.

Only a North and South Korea reunited on the basis of democratic control of the economy can fully harness the talents and resources of ordinary Koreans and deliver real peace and security...

Gary Hollands

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