

North Korea in the Great Nuclear Game

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The political-media spotlights are directed at North Korea's nuclear missile tests. Yet the general context in which these test are taking place is completely obscured. What is this context? An arms race that is gathering pace, that while it maintains a nuclear arsenal capable of wiping out the human race from the face of the Earth, points its heads and high tech carriers that are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

In 2017, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) considers that North Korea has "fissile material with the potential to produce 10-20 nuclear heads, but there is no evidence available that it has made operational nuclear heads that can be transported by ballistic missiles". Still going by what the FAS reports, the U.S. has 6,800 nuclear heads of which 1,650 are strategic and 150 are non-strategic, poised for immediate launch. Including the French and British heads (300 and 215 respectively),

Nato nuclear forces have 7,315 nuclear heads, of which 2,200 are ready for launch, compared with 7,000 Russian nuclear heads of which 1,950 are ready for launch. Still, going by what the FAS thinks, around 550 US, French and British heads ready for launch, are stationed in Europe in the closest proximity to Russian territory. The analogy would be if Russia had lined up in Mexico a hundred nuclear heads pointed at the U.S. Taking account of the Chinese bombs (270), Pakistani bombs (120-130), Indian bombs (110-120) and Israeli bombs (80), the total number of nuclear heads is estimated at about 15,000. Of course these are approximate figures, almost certainly default. And the race to nuclear weapons continues while the nuclear heads and nuclear carriers are constantly being updated.

Leading the pack is the United States which is constantly running tests on Minuteman III, its intercontinental ballistic missiles and is prepared to replace them with new missiles (the cost of which is estimated at 85 billion dollars). In 2015, Congress approved a plan (the cost of which is estimated at around 1,000 billion) to fortify its nuclear forces with another 12 submarines for attack (each 7 billion), each armed with 200 nuclear heads, and other strategic bombers (550 million each), each armed with 20 nuclear heads. This is the backdrop for replacing the US nuclear bombs B61, stationed in Italy and other European countries, with the new B61-12, weapons for a first strike. The nuclear forces have also been strengthened by the "anti-missile shield" to neutralize enemy reprisal, such as those lined up by the US in Europe against Russia and in South Korea, not against North Korea but in actual fact, against China.

Russia and China are speeding up the modernization of their nuclear forces so that they do not fall behind. 2018 will see Russia lining up a new intercontinental ballistic missile, the Sarmat, with an 18,000 km range, capable of transporting 10-15 nuclear heads that, entering the atmosphere at a hypersonic speed (more than 10 times the speed of sound),

manoeuvre so as to dodge the interceptive missiles piercing the “shield”.

In such a situation, where a closed circle of states maintains an oligopoly over nuclear weapons, where the state that possesses them threatens the state that does not have them, it is increasingly probable that other states will seek to obtain them for themselves ... mission accomplished. In addition to the nine states that already have nuclear weapons, there are around another 35 states with the capability to build them.

And yet the newspapers and the news pay no heed to this; they set off the alarm on North Korea, condemned as the exclusive source for the nuclear threat. Also left out of consideration is the lesson that in Pyongyang they say they have learnt: Gaddafi – they recall – had totally renounced every kind of nuclear programme, allowing CIA inspection on Libyan territory. However, this did not save him when the USA and Nato decided to destroy the Libyan State. And so they reason in Pyongyang that if this state had had nuclear weapons, no one would have had the courage to attack it. Such a conclusion can also be extracted from other examples: in the present global climate, it is better to have nuclear weapons than not to have them.

Meanwhile on the basis of this dangerous logic, the probability of nuclear proliferation increases. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted by the vast majority of the United Nations last July, is ignored by all nuclear powers, by Nato members (Italy included) and by their principal partners (Ukraine, Japan and Australia). Fundamentally, there is a large mobilization for insisting that our country is also a party to the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons and therefore must remove from its territory the U.S. bombs lined up there. The presence of these bombs also violates the Non-Proliferation Treaty which Italy has already ratified. If you lack a political conscience, then at the very least, your basic survival instinct should be triggered.

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