

North Korea Is Not the Provocateur

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As each day passes, a major conflict between the United States and North Korea looks increasingly likely. The ratcheting-up of tensions between Washington and Pyongyang is being perpetuated by a corporate media that is [reinforcing the myth](#) that North Korea is provoking the conflict and is a barrier to peace. The solution is one that is deemed to require a military response from the Trump administration. The Council on Foreign Relations, [appear to reaffirm](#) this is the consensus position in Washington.

[According to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi](#), we're moving toward a collision on the Korean Peninsula, that's like two trains rushing toward each other. Furthermore, William Perry, the former defense secretary and Bill Clinton's ambassador for North Korea in the late 1990s, [also said](#) that he thought a train wreck was coming.

The backdrop to these shenanigans was the [test last month](#) by North Korea of a intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). The country is being characterized as an existential threat to the US – a characterization that has been [massively exaggerated for propaganda purposes](#).

Tim Beal [adds some flesh to the bones](#):

"The balance of military power between the US and its 'allies' (the [imperial alliance structure](#) is a major part of American power) scarcely needs elaboration or documentation. South Korea on its own has a military budget perhaps [30 times that of the North](#), has, generally speaking, much more advanced and modern equipment (it buys more [weapons](#) from the US than even Saudi Arabia) and, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), can field two and a half times more troops ([standing army plus reservists](#)) than the North. Bring in the US and its allies, including especially Japan, and the imbalance is astounding: a combined military budget of roughly \$1 trillion against North Korea's [\\$1.2 to \\$10 billion](#). The portrayal of North Korea as a threat to the US is not merely wrong, it is preposterously and diametrically at variance with reality."

That the government in Pyongyang undertook the ICBM test against a situation in which China and North Korea [offered a plan to de-escalate tensions](#), subsequently rejected by the US, was a scenario that had been quietly overlooked by the media. North Korean foreign minister, Bang Kwang Hyok [said](#) that unless the US fundamentally abandons its hostile policy towards his country, its weapons programme "will never be up for negotiation."

The war of words continued a month later (August 8, 2017), after Trump [promised](#) North Korea “will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen” in response to reports that the country had developed the ability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead so that it can be placed on a missile.

Tensions were further escalated [two days later](#) when Trump said that his ‘fire and fury’ comments were perhaps not “tough enough” and refused to rule out what he called a “preventive” strike against the country.

Historical context

The context underlying the continuing US hostility towards North Korea, stems from June, 1950 when the [US imposed sanctions on the country](#) and engaged in military exercises that involved the flying of nuclear warheads over Korean air space after the American administration had actually dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

These ‘war games’ are also the context in which the US dropped napalm and white phosphorus on North Korea completely destroying it from 1950-53. [Up to 4 million Koreans](#) would have lived had not the US instigated their war of aggression.

US General Douglas MacArthur testified to Congress in 1951 that:

‘The war in Korea has already destroyed that nation of 20,000,000 people. I have never seen such devastation. I have seen, I guess, as much blood and disaster as any living man, and it just curdled my stomach, the last time I was there. After I looked at that wreckage and those thousands of women and children and everything, I vomited.’ (‘Napalm – An American Biography’ by Robert Neer, Belknap Press, 2013, [p. 100](#), quoted by [Media Lens](#)).

US Air Force General Curtis LeMay wrote:

“We burned down just about every city in North Korea and South Korea both...we killed off over a million civilians and drove several million more from their homes, with the inevitable additional tragedies bound to ensue.” (Ibid., [p. 100](#), quoted by [Media Lens](#)).

This, and [the imposition](#) by the US of a military dictatorship on South Korea that imprisoned, tortured and killed political opponents, is also the reason why many people in Korea view Pyongyang’s relationship with the Americans from a position of defense rather than offense.

The ‘war games’ continue to be played decades later as a result of the [expansion by the US of its military bases](#) throughout the pacific region. From [North Korea’s perspective](#), Washington’s provocation is akin to Russia or China deploying strategic nuclear weapons and thousands of their troops on the US-Mexico border and rehearsing military exercises that simulate the potential collapse of Washington.



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Numerous other countries test their nuclear weapons – the United States included – but none elicit the kind of punishment that’s being meted out to North Korea. Pyongyang has done nothing to threaten Washington, rather the threats are the other way around. The aggressive US stance is, of course, in no way related to the probability, as Business Insider [pointed out](#), that North Korea’s “mountainous regions are thought to sit on around 200 different minerals, including, crucially, a large number of rare earth metals... thought to be worth [more than \\$6 trillion](#).”

China

Trump has attempted to divert US culpability by insisting that China has not played a sufficient enough role in trying to de-escalate the situation. But China [does not have the leverage](#) to prevent North Korea from developing its nuclear weapons programme.

Writer Hyun Lee [raised the legitimate point](#) that China does not want a pro-US Korea led by the south because that would result in US troops “pushing up to the Chinese border.” North Korea has always acted as a convenient buffer state for China in much the same way that the former Soviet Union provided a counter-balance to US imperial ambitions. In other words, it makes no sense to expect China to resolve the impasse because both the US and China have very different strategic interests in the region.

From China’s perspective, a nuclear weapons-free Korea clearly presents a potential threat to its interests. It is worth reminding readers that twenty years ago North Korea didn’t possess any ICBM weapons. It was only from the Bush administration onward that tensions were once again ratcheted up between the two nations as part of Washington’s geopolitical agenda of [full-spectrum dominance](#) and the “war on terrorism” narrative that accompanied it.

Bush Doctrine

Critical in widening the focus of this narrative has, of course, been the policy of associating terrorism with states that are then presented as legitimate targets of military action. In his State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, G W Bush [reaffirmed](#) that “our war on terror is just the beginning.” In addition to attacking terrorist networks, he said, “our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction”, and named Iran, Iraq and North Korea as “an axis of evil”.

John Bolton subsequently [extended the net](#), identifying Libya, Syria and Cuba as “state sponsors of terrorism that are pursuing or have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction.” The full scale of Bush’s “axis of evil” speech was revealed four months later in an address he made at West Point in what the Financial Times [announced](#) as “an entirely fresh doctrine of pre-emptive action.” This Bush Doctrine of (as one administration official put it) “pre-emptive retaliation” [is enshrined](#) in the *National Security Strategy*:

“While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting pre-emptively.”

Central to the strategy of the US throughout the Cold War was a policy of containment – that is, the resistance by America of any attempts to extend the bloc carved out by the Soviets in

Central and Eastern Europe during the latter phases of the Second World War. Containment survived the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The same logic applies to Trumps strategy in relation to North Korea. Any future Pre-emptive “retaliatory” strike by the US against the country is premised on the notion that any state foolish enough to mount a nuclear, chemical or biological strike against America would be committing national suicide. Assuming that Kim Jong Un is not insane (there is no evidence to suggest he is), therefore, makes the argument that a pre-emptive strike against Korea is imperative, somewhat redundant.

Might is right

The country learned from the experiences of Iraq and Libya and from its negotiations with Washington, that the only thing the US appears to respond to is military might and so logically determined that only the threat of nuclear weapons would deter the world’s biggest nuclear superpower from a hostile attack.

There was some hope for a lasting peaceful resolution to the conflict between the two countries following a deal brokered by former president Jimmy Carter in 1994 under the Clinton administration only for this to subsequently be scuppered by G W Bush.

Noam Chomsky [provides some detail](#):

“George W. Bush came in and immediately launched an assault on North Korea—you know, “axis of evil,” sanctions and so on. North Korea turned to producing nuclear weapons. In 2005, there was an agreement between North Korea and the United States, a pretty sensible agreement. North Korea agreed to terminate its development of nuclear weapons. In return, it called for a nonaggression pact. So, stop making hostile threats, relief from harsh sanctions, and provision of a system to provide North Korea with low-enriched uranium for medical and other purposes—that was the proposal. George Bush instantly tore it to shreds. Within days, the U.S. was imposing—trying to disrupt North Korean financial transactions with other countries through Macau and elsewhere. North Korea backed off, started building nuclear weapons again. I mean, maybe you can say it’s the worst regime in history, whatever you like, but they have been following a pretty rational tit-for-tat policy.”

Against a situation in which North Korea continues to adopt a rational policy to defend its sovereignty from the hostile acts and sanctions of an overarching aggressor, and with a US president remaining bellicose by refusing to engage in diplomacy, it’s clear that the world is currently at the edge of a precipice.

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