

## Are We “Running Out of Time” on North Korea?

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### Abstract

Tensions and rhetoric between the U.S. and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are spiraling to an all-time high and the stakes could not be any more substantial. North Korea’s behavior is extremely provocative and soon the regime will possess an intercontinental nuclear capability. The prevailing opinion of the Trump Administration is that “we are running out of time on North Korea.” The U.S. is not “running out of time” on the Korean Peninsula and must continue and enhance the current policy of strategic accountability to compel the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to denuclearize, but be prepared to meet the challenge of deterring the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s nuclear aggression for the long term until the regime collapses or moderates. The costs associated with a preventive war with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are unacceptably high. The best of a bad set of strategic options for the U.S. is deterrence with respect to North Korea.

## **Are We “Running Out of Time” on North Korea?**

We defended our allies in Europe for 40 years during the worst days of the Cold War - very threatening days of the Cold War - and nothing happened. So deterrence does work.

—Zbigniew Brzezinski<sup>1</sup>

Is the Second Korean War imminent? No. Even as the stakes on the Korean Peninsula rise to the all-time high of potential nuclear conflict, options other than war are available to the U.S. and her allies. The geostrategic and historical importance of the Korean Peninsula is cannot be overestimated. The only region in the world where the four great powers of the U.S., Russia, China, and Japan meet, compete, and clash is Northeast Asia. This grand competition in Northeast Asia is heating to a boiling point in light of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) nuclear ambitions.

With the Korean Peninsula as its kinetic center, Northeast Asia (NEA) is the only international region or sub-region where the world’s four great powers (China, Russia, Japan, and the United States) uneasily meet and interact, and where their respective interests coalesce, compete, or clash. The world’s heaviest concentration of military, political, and economic capabilities is in NEA: (1) the world’s three largest nuclear states (the U.S., Russia, and China), one small nuclear state (North Korea), and three threshold nuclear states (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan); (2) five of the world’s top ten military budgets (U.S., China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea); (3) the world’s three largest economies (U.S., China, and Japan); and (4) three of the UN Security Council’s five permanent members (U.S., China, and Russia).<sup>2</sup>

Tensions and rhetoric between the U.S. and the DPRK are spiraling to an all-time high since the 1950s and the stakes could not be any more substantial. The prevailing opinion of the Trump Administration is that “we are running out of time on North Korea.”<sup>3</sup> The U.S. is not “running out of time” on the Korean Peninsula and must continue and enhance the current policy of strategic accountability to compel the DPRK to

denuclearize, but be prepared to meet the challenge of deterring the DPRK's nuclear aggression for the long term until the regime collapses or moderates.

### Background

North Korea has presented a security challenge for the U.S. and its allies since the Korean War and the 1953 Armistice and is arguably the most significant current national security threat to the U.S. because this volatile hermit regime now has a nuclear capability to strike at the U.S. homeland. North Korea seeks to maintain its authoritarian regime and enhance its military deterrent, and "few deterrents are as effective as nuclear weapons. Pyongyang's unswerving progress toward developing a nuclear capability reflects the singular obsession with which it chases its goals and why the West takes its threats so seriously."<sup>4</sup> Until recently North Korea did not pose an imminent threat to the U.S. homeland. However, North Korea's recent progress in developing a viable nuclear warhead and inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) serves to amplify the scope and scale of a North Korean threat with the ability to potentially strike the continental U.S. The threat posed by North Korean nuclear and missile programs to the U.S. homeland has significantly elevated the immediacy and risk to a crisis level and is altering the U.S. posture of extended deterrence in the region. Is Washington willing to meet its mutual defense treaties of extended deterrence with Seoul and Tokyo? Is the Trump Administration willing to potentially risk Seattle in order to defend Seoul?

### U.S. Policy on North Korea

On August 14, 2017 Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis outlined the goals of U.S. policy for North Korea as:

The object of our peaceful pressure campaign is the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. has no interest in regime change or accelerated reunification of Korea. We do not seek an excuse to garrison U.S. troops north of the Demilitarized Zone. We have no desire to inflict harm on the long-suffering North Korean people, who are distinct from the hostile regime in Pyongyang.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. policy for denuclearizing North Korea calls for maximizing U.S. and international pressure on the Kim Jong-un regime in order to compel the North Koreans to negotiate and to escalate tensions to de-escalate through the use of “maximum pressure” or “strategic accountability.”<sup>6</sup> Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Susan Thornton indicates that the “unprecedentedly strong” sanctions are “working” in North Korea.<sup>7</sup> The means of maximizing pressure on the North Koreans thus far has been isolation and sanctions. Additional military options to enhance deterrence and increase the pressure on the Kim regime are available to compel the Kim regime back to the bargaining table. However, time may be limited before North Korea is capable of striking the U.S. with a nuclear tipped ICBM and Secretary Mattis has stated that “all options are on the table.”<sup>8</sup> North Korea can be de-nuclearized by force; however, the costs to do so would be high, especially for South Korea and potentially intolerable. This Kim regime presently possesses the capability to strike Seoul with up to 10,000 rounds per minute of conventional and chemical-laden artillery.<sup>9</sup> In the near future, Kim will also be capable of holding U.S. cities as nuclear hostages.

According to Senator Lindsey Graham, the Administration had to choose between a strategy of containment or denial of North Korean nuclear ambition. President Trump chose denial because the Administration presumed that the Kim regime could not be contained. The decision was made to deny North Korea an intercontinental nuclear capability because the Trump Administration’s opinion was that

North Korea cannot be prevented from selling any military capability that it develops to other rogue actors. Senator Graham further asserts that the Kim regime will only moderate its behavior if the regime believes that the U.S. will respond militarily.<sup>10</sup> Convincing North Korea that the U.S. will strike militarily and the U.S. actually conducting a preventive strike is not one and the same. There is value in the go-to-war hyperbole of the Trump Administration in order to drive the Kim regime to reasonably believe that the U.S. is serious about an offensive military option. However, the costs of conducting a military preventive strike outweigh the benefits to the U.S. and her allies.

DPRK Intercontinental Nuclear Capability Development

Table 1. North Korean ICBM and Nuclear Weapon Development Timeline<sup>11</sup>

OCT 2006	Successful underground nuclear weapons test.
APR 2009	Launch of a three-stage rocket Taepodong/Unha rocket.
MAY 2009	Second nuclear detonation.
DEC 2012	Third Taepodong/Unha rocket launch successfully puts a satellite into orbit.
FEB 2013	Third nuclear detonation.
MAR 2014	Two successful ballistic missile launches.
NOV 2015	Failed submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test.
DEC 2015	Successful SLBM launch.
JAN 2016	Successful nuclear detonation. North Korea claims to have detonated a hydrogen bomb.
FEB 2016	Successful ballistic missile launch places another satellite into orbit.
APR-OCT 2016	One of eight Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missile launches is successful.
JUL 2017	North Korea successfully tests an inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) that can reach the western continental U.S.
AUG 2017	Defense Intelligence Agency found that North Korea has produced miniaturized nuclear warheads for ballistic missile delivery.
SEP 2017	North Korea releases a photo of a miniaturized thermonuclear warhead and conducts a successful hydrogen bomb test.
NOV 2017	Successful launch of Hwasong-15 potentially capable of reaching the entire continental U.S.

North Korea's recent successes in weapons development "have led analysts and policy makers to conclude that the window for preventing the DPRK from acquiring a nuclear missile capable of reaching the U.S. is closing."<sup>12</sup> Based on the incremental improvements in weapons design that North Korea has achieved in the past several years, it is plausible that North Korea could possess nuclear tipped-ICBMs that could reach the continental U.S. as early as 2018.<sup>13</sup> The only incremental step that North Korea has yet to demonstrate is warhead re-entry. However, according to other sources, the July 2017 ICBM test indicates that the re-entry vehicle survived to adequate altitude to deliver a 30-kiloton warhead.<sup>14</sup> Former acting director of the CIA Mike Morell has even gone as far as stating that, "I believe that North Korea has the technical capability and has had the time necessary to make a nuclear weapon small enough to fit on a long-range missile and to ensure that the warhead can survive the vibrations, pressures, and the heat of re-entry."<sup>15</sup> If North Korea does not presently have the capability to strike the U.S. now, all indications predict that North Korea will gain the capability very soon. The U.S. might not just be "running out of time"; time may have already run out for Washington to conduct preventive military action on the Korean Peninsula without risking Seattle or San Francisco.

#### Why North Korea Refuses to De-nuclearize

The North Korean leaders are adamant that they will never give up their nuclear capability. And why would they? They are not going to give up their nuclear program just because the world wants it to happen. North Korea is an isolationist fiefdom that has a failed economy, chronic food shortages, and is ruled by arguably the most repressive regime in the world. In order to understand the DPRK's fixation on its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs we must view the world through Kim

Jong-un's lens. In May 2017 testimony, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats repeated the intelligence community's longstanding analysis that, "Pyongyang's nuclear capabilities are intended for deterrence, international prestige, and coercive diplomacy."<sup>16</sup> The DPRK's weapons program is probably the best thing that the country has going for it. The DPRK is already effectively a nuclear state and the only state to voluntarily to give up a nuclear capability is South Africa at the end of apartheid (other than former USSR states upon the collapse of the Soviet Union). In light of the DPRK's commitment to "juche" or self-reliance combined with the national policy of "byungjin" which is the "simultaneous development of its nuclear weapons and its economy," it is hard to imagine a scenario in which the regime willingly gives up its nuclear capability.<sup>17</sup> It is a reasonable belief that Kim Jong-un considers possessing a nuclear capability essential for regime survival.

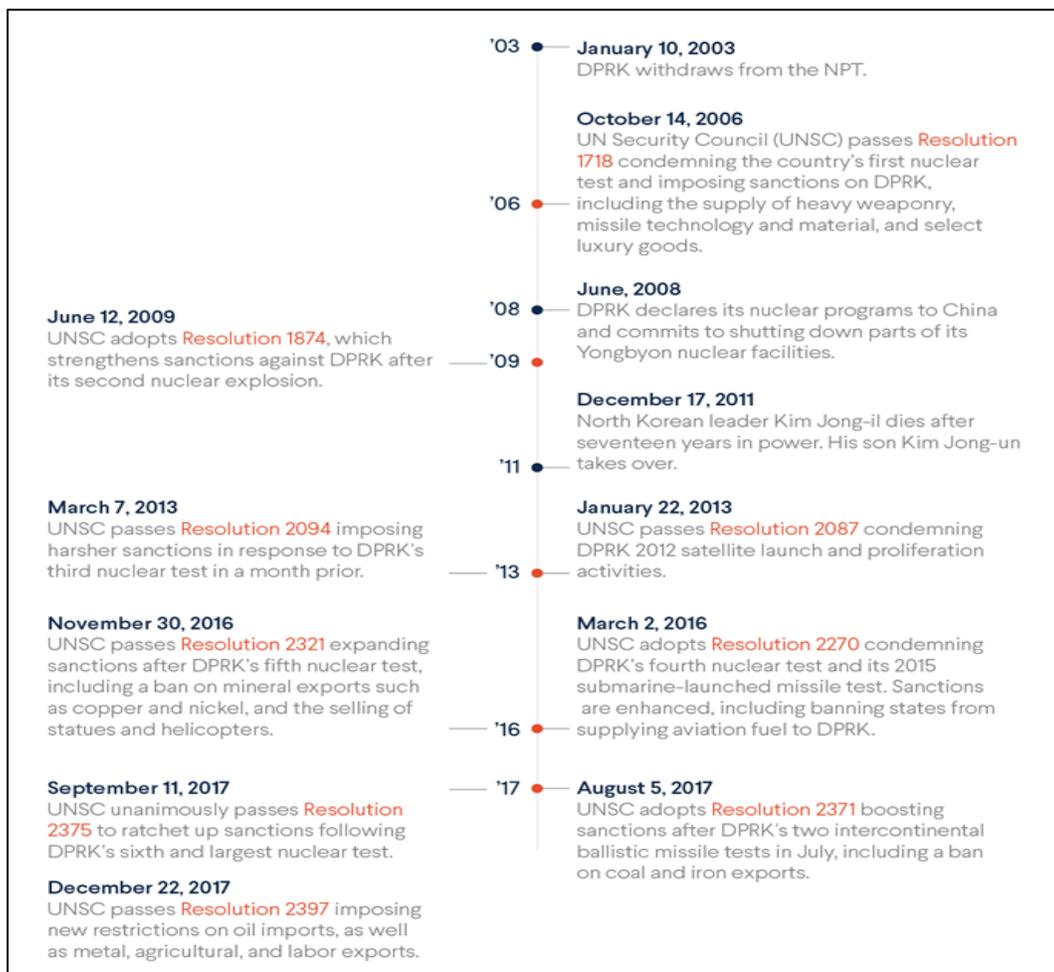
The results of the coalition intervention in Libya after the Qaddafi regime abandoned its nascent nuclear program demonstrated the U.S. Government's signal to the world that countries without a nuclear capability are subject to potential regime change. It is easily surmised that the Kim regime will not willingly give up its nuclear resources without a fight. Just because it is believed with a fair amount of certainty that the Kim regime will never give up its nuclear capability does not mean that the U.S. should cease its coercion efforts to compel the regime to de-nuclearize. Kim Jong-un is not going to live forever. The regime will not survive into perpetuity. Based on the staggering level of oppression of human rights, terrible living conditions, and increasing penetration of the DPRK by Western influences and ideas, the Kim regime could plausibly collapse on its own in the near term.<sup>18</sup> Or, the regime could continue to stagger

along for another century. Invariably, the U.S. and the region should be concurrently postured for both scenarios.

### Deterrence is the Least Worst Option

There are no easy answers about what to do in North Korea. The best of a bad set of options is for the U.S. and her allies is to maintain and reinforce the current pressure campaign in order to meet the initial ends of bringing the DPRK to diplomatic negotiations.

Table 2. North Korean Sanctions Timeline<sup>19</sup>



The U.S. should continue to work with the UN and international community to expand sanctions in order to achieve North Korean nuclear restraint through diplomatic

measures. Expanded UN sanctions would authorize a naval quarantine of North Korea. Expanding and reinforcing the 2003 Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) would permit a global naval blockade which would facilitate interdiction of illicit North Korean imports and exports.<sup>20</sup> 105 countries have endorsed the PSI and it was established as a global effort “to stop trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern.”<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, the U.S. should continue to seek multilateral negotiations with North Korea and a return to the Six-Party Talks. In the near term, the U.S. must contain the North Korean threat, which could allow economic sanctions more time to work. Through negotiations the U.S. would offer less military posturing and reduced sanctions in exchange for a less provocative North Korea. Moving forward through the negotiations process the U.S. would offer a roll-back of military posturing in Northeast Asia in exchange for a verifiable freeze in North Korean nuclear and missile development. Ultimately, a final peace treaty could follow with nuclear and missile dismantlement.

Given the Kim regime’s history, however, North Korea is not likely to acquiesce to diplomacy, which leaves us with deterrence. The DPRK has an adequately developed nuclear capability. Even in the unlikely event that Kim voluntarily denuclearized, the toothpaste is out of the tube. A denuclearized North Korea could quickly and easily reestablish its nuclear capability under Kim Jong-un or another similar-minded despot. China is key to leveraging an effective pressure campaign on North Korea. Although China’s relationship has thawed over the years with North Korea, its alliance with North Korea is often regarded as “an alliance in name only.”<sup>22</sup> However, China will only go so far in pressuring North Korea as its interests take her. China

accounts for 90 percent of North Korea's trade.<sup>23</sup> However, "Beijing has multiple, complex strategic considerations...[and] it wants to send a message to Kim Jong-un that his nuclear program is unacceptable and to punish bad behavior, but it does not want to trigger North Korea's collapse or turn its neighbor into a permanent enemy."<sup>24</sup> Another potential bad outcome for the Chinese would be a heavily U.S. influenced re-united Korean Peninsula under a South Korean flag.

Through strategic messaging the U.S. should convey to the North Koreans that we are serious about compelling them to reduce their missile and nuclear programs with relentless sanctions and even preventive offensive military operations. As noted, China is central to pressuring North Korea. It would be in Beijing's best interest to cooperate with the U.S., South Korea, and Japan now to compel the DPRK to denuclearize with Kim remaining in power to prevent a Korean Peninsula that is heavily influenced by Washington. Threats of military strikes not only signal the North Koreans; they can serve to influence China to "exert more pressure on North Korea, lest war engulf China as well."<sup>25</sup> However, in this strategy the U.S. would not actually conduct preventive offensive military operations. Threats of a preventive military strike can serve to enhance deterrence. Testy rhetoric and believable saber rattling can be an asset to deterrence through coercion and the diplomacy of violence. The U.S. and her allies could forcibly denuclearize North Korea; however, the costs of conducting preventive military operations in North Korea are tremendous. North Korea's conventional artillery threat which is capable of leveling Seoul, home to half of South Korea's population of 51.5 million, should all but preclude preventive military operations.

In addition to the current pressure campaign on the DPRK, the U.S. and its partners in the region can enhance deterrence by increasing their military posture on and around the Korean Peninsula. In response to North Korean belligerence or non-acceptance of diplomatic overtures the U.S. would begin increasing its presence in Northeast Asia by forward-deploying rotational units into South Korea and Japan to counter the conventional threat and continue to maintain the present enhanced focus in the Sea of Japan. The U.S. would need to establish long term, well-coordinated deterrence through trilateral diplomacy (U.S., Japan, ROK) by appointing ambassadors, and dialoging with high-ranking U.S. officials to reassure allies of extended deterrence and flexible response to prevent the decoupling of allies. The U.S. and its allies could establish high-level exercises/drills to reinforce assurance of the U.S. defense umbrella. The U.S. would also increase the frequency and scope of exercises in the region and potentially re-introduce tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula in an attempt to escalate for the purpose of deescalating.

The U.S. should also re-visit its Cold War playbook. Even though nuclear weapons have not been employed in the twenty-first century, actors wielding nuclear weapons and a robust conventional force possess the potential for tremendous coercive power. Thomas Schelling is best known as a master theorist of nuclear strategy and his concepts are just as valid now with respect to North Korea as they were during the height of the Cold War.<sup>26</sup> Schelling created a coherent framework for applying coercion in the field of international relations. Coercive diplomacy is the forceful persuasion to leverage the “exploitation of potential force.”<sup>27</sup> Schelling tells us that the “power to hurt” is at the foundation of coercive diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> Not only must an actor wield the “power to

hurt,” but the opponent must also believe in the actor’s willingness to employ the “hurt.” President Trump’s statement with respect to North Korea that, “They will be met fire and fury like the world has never seen,” although most likely hyperbole, assists in demonstrating the U.S.’s willingness to employ the “hurt.”<sup>29</sup> Coercion does not equal brute force or violence for the sake of executing violent actions; it depends on the relative strengths and desires of the opponents. In coercive bargaining, the “power to hurt” is most effective when held in reserve.<sup>30</sup> In order to effectively coerce an opponent, you must know what is important enough to your opponent to compel or deter a specific desired behavior or action. Further, your opponent, in this case North Korea, needs to reliably believe that the U.S. will actually follow through on your threat of violence. The U.S. possesses the most capable and dynamic conventional military in the world as well as a robust nuclear arsenal, but because of the reluctance to apply these weapons, the U.S.’s competitors including North Korea know that the U.S. will not employ the nuclear option to reach policy goals unless under extreme crisis circumstances. The U.S.’s ability to “hurt” is severely hampered because her adversaries know that the U.S. nuclear arsenal is only relevant in the most unconscionable of grievances.

In addition to the U.S.’s robust nuclear arsenal, the U.S. is the global hegemon with the strongest instruments of power on the globe. Because the U.S. cannot reasonably threaten to engage her competitors with nuclear arms, the U.S. must effectively use other resources to strike bargains with its competitors and the “power to hurt” generates some of this bargaining power. The U.S. possesses the resources to compel a foe through the threat of violence even without nuclear weapons; however, because the U.S.’s reluctance to sufficiently “hurt” a competitor, the power of coercion is

presently limited. The most significant example was the Obama Administration's reluctance to act when establishing a "red line" to the Assad regime of Syria regarding the use of chemical weapons. After Assad violated the "red line," the U.S. failed to respond in a forceful manner, setting the precedent that the U.S. is not willing to follow through with the "hurt" necessary for coercion to be an effective tool.

Adam Elkus posits in *War on the Rocks* that the U.S. has forgotten how to compel a foe.

To compel a foe is to forcibly make them do as you wish by hurting them - and raising the threat of future harms - until they cry uncle... Thomas Schelling famously wrote about how to do it in *Arms and Influence* - written at the height of the Cold War. This compellence may occur via a bombing campaign or a few isolated clashes, feints, threats, or maneuvers. The mechanism is not as important as the use and/or threat of armed violence and other relevant means to get someone to do as we please. We seem to have forgotten about these venerable ideas.<sup>31</sup>

The U.S. is presently struggling in applying the "diplomacy of violence" because its competitors know the U.S. has the capability to provide significant "hurt"; however, they believe that the U.S. does not possess the will to follow through with delivering it. If the U.S. was unable to compel Bashar Al-Assad not to use chemical weapons, how can the U.S. expect to coerce Kim Jong-un to de-nuclearize? Schelling's three-part answer to the North Korea problem would be to: First, exploit the bargaining power that comes from the physical harm that the U.S. can inflict; second, strike a strategic bargain at a "mutually acceptable resting place"; and third, maintain the strategic bargain over time through a "balance of terror."<sup>32</sup>

Deterrence is not exciting or sexy, but provides "additional space and time for diplomacy, sanctions, and other instruments of national power to convince leaders in Pyongyang that a freeze or roll-back of its nuclear and missile programs might be the

most prudent course to forestall a military confrontation with the U.S. that threatens the survival of the regime itself.”<sup>33</sup> So far, the policies of strategic accountability and strategic patience have failed to denuclearize the DPRK. The U.S. must continue to demonstrate patience and resolve in her policy towards the Kim regime and up the ante in pressuring Pyongyang. U.S. policy makers need to settle in for long-term deterrence of North Korean nuclear aggression. This deterrent policy may need to remain in place through multiple administrations and many election cycles before potential regime capitulation or moderation.

The U.S. must establish a consistent strategy similar to the NSC-68 model of Soviet containment which served the U.S. well throughout the Cold War. Optimally, a stable and peaceful North Korea is in the world’s best interest; however, a stable and peaceful North Korea does not appear likely under the Kim regime. Yet, Kim’s brutal behavior is not dissimilar to that of Soviet leaders during the Cold War and the U.S. successfully deterred the Soviets for decades when they possessed thousands of nuclear weapons and the DPRK likely only has a handful. The nuclear deterrence of the Soviet Union was an uneasy peace. However, nuclear deterrence was ultimately successful through the fall of the Soviet Union and into the Russian era. Chris Bolan, professor at the U.S. Army War College, eloquently surmises that “nuclear deterrence has a perfect record of success since the United States dropped atomic weapons on Japan to end World War II in 1945. Dictators responsible for the deaths of millions (including Mao and Stalin) have been successfully deterred from using their nuclear weapons by U.S. policies that stopped short of preventive war.”<sup>34</sup> There are no guarantees that the DPRK can be successfully deterred for over half a century as the

Soviets/Russians have been, but what is guaranteed is that any attempt to forcibly de-nuclearize the DPRK will come at a significant cost of both blood and treasure.

### Counter Arguments to Deterrence

Alternate strategic options postulated for de-nuclearizing the Korean Peninsula run the gamut from easing tensions and normalizing relations with the DPRK in order to seek a diplomatic solution all the way to the other end of the spectrum of military strikes to force regime change. All available options present costs and risk.

#### Accommodation

The U.S. could initiate an alternate strategy that pursues normalization of relations with North Korea as a conduit to entice North Korea to join the international system and abide by international norms and conventions. As alluring as it seems, easing tensions with the DPRK and initiating a charm offensive will not be helpful. The U.S. is not in the business of rewarding bad behavior. If we alleviate the pressure campaign on the DPRK in the hopes of compelling less inflammatory behavior from the North Koreans, there is nothing in the DPRK's history that would suggest that the Kim regime would change for the better. The DPRK has a history of not meeting its international obligations and agreements. The world is watching and the Trump Administration knows it. If we ease the pressure campaign on North Korea it will be viewed as an accommodation or appeasement and other rogue regimes such as Iran will potentially model themselves after the DPRK and this would even further encourage Iran's own nuclear ambitions.

The inverse with regard to Iran is telling as well. Sen. Lindsey Graham used the Iran case to explain the risks of moderating the U.S. stance against North Korea. Following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), better known as the Iran

nuclear deal, Iran was granted relief from U.S., European Union, and United Nations Security Council sanctions. In exchange for sanctions relief, Iran rolled back its nuclear program; however, Iran has remained provocative and has increased its aggressive behaviors on the world stage. Iran's behavior did not moderate. Instead, Iran invested the gains resulting from the JCPOA in expanding her regional power. Iran exploited the resources gained through the easing of sanctions not to better the lives of the Iranian people, but to expand Tehran's malign influence by further destabilizing the region through terrorism and proxy activity.<sup>35</sup> The DPRK's history indicates that the same sorts of aggressive and provocative behaviors exhibited by Iran would be accomplished by the Kim regime if the pressure campaign on North Korea were diminished. The U.S. and its partners must demonstrate to future provocateurs just how costly pursuing nuclear ambitions can be.

### Preventive War

However unpleasant, many scholars and national security professionals make persuasive arguments for initiating a preventive war with North Korea. The logic that the U.S. is "running out of time" is based on:

[the] argument that the price paid must be weighed in the context of future potential costs, should attempts be made to denuclearize North Korea after it has developed a nuclear deterrent or, frighteningly, in the case of a North Korean first strike. Following this logic, there is a compelling case to be made that the cost of military intervention right now is justified, purely considering the alternatives. Almost any price would be acceptable if it meant avoiding a nuclear conflict in the future.<sup>36</sup>

National security professionals have predicted that a U.S.-ROK alliance would defeat the DPRK in a matter of weeks.<sup>37</sup> And, "Some analysts contend...that the risk of allowing the Kim Jong-un regime to acquire a nuclear weapon capable of targeting the U.S. homeland is of even greater concern than the risks associated with the outbreak of

regional war, especially given Pyongyang's long history of bombastic threats and aggressive action toward the U.S. and its allies and the regime's long-stated interest in unifying the Korean Peninsula on its terms."<sup>38</sup> Most proponents for preventive war claim that the U.S. could successfully destroy or seize North Korea's nuclear infrastructure in a brief amount of time. However, if the U.S. chooses to denuclearize North Korea through kinetic means, South Korea and possibly Japan must be prepared to pay a steep price. In the case of preventive war, China would be deeply impacted by an influx of refugees from North Korea, not to mention the potential of finding itself faced with a re-unified Korean Peninsula with American boots on its former North Korean border.

The author and political scientist Edward Luttwak presents the case for U.S. kinetic action against North Korea. His argument is that North Korea cannot directly retaliate against the U.S. presently; however, time is running out before the Kim regime can strike directly at the U.S. homeland, "or rather an anticipation of a future that could still be averted by prompt action."<sup>39</sup> Luttwak minimizes U.S. obligations to our ally South Korea for the expected North Korean response of a massive retaliatory artillery strike on Seoul by claiming that the South Korean vulnerability is "largely self-inflicted." He identifies three reasons that absolve the U.S. of responsibility for South Korean casualties. First, the U.S. "urged the Korean government to move its ministries and bureaucrats well away from the country's northern border." Second, South Korea did not establish adequate public shelters. Third, the South Koreans chose not to import Iron Dome missile defense batteries when they had the option to procure them at reasonable costs, "that would be capable of intercepting 95 percent of North Korean rockets headed to inhabited structures."<sup>40</sup> The crux of Luttwak's argument is that, "given

South Korea's deliberate inaction over many years, any damage ultimately done to Seoul cannot be allowed to paralyze the U.S. in the face of immense danger to its own national interests, and to those of its other allies elsewhere in the world. North Korea is already unique in selling its ballistic missiles, to Iran most notably; it's not difficult to imagine it selling nuclear weapons, too."<sup>41</sup>

### Bloody Nose Strike

If the U.S. were to conduct kinetic preventive military operations in North Korea, the options for a military strike vary in intensity from simply intercepting ballistic missile launches all the way to forcing North Korean regime change, and the subsequent stability operations that would follow. Intercepting ballistic missile test launches would be the least aggressive and the least likely to spiral into major conflict. The desired ends are to deny the DPRK the ability to adequately test missile delivery systems through intercepting DPRK missile launches utilizing U.S. ballistic missile defense systems such as ground-based Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) batteries and sea-based Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD). Even though this limited military option is the least likely to spiral into major conflict, the risk of a North Korean kinetic response to any type of U.S. strike is more likely than not. Thae Yong Ho, former deputy DPRK Ambassador to the United Kingdom warns that, "any military attack on North Korea, no matter how small, will prompt a fierce response."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, a minimal "bloody nose" attack by the U.S. could easily escalate into a full-scale conflict.

A more significant military action than interdicting North Korean missile launches would be to eliminate DPRK nuclear and missile facilities. The desired ends of this preventive attack are to destroy DPRK missile launch sites, nuclear production facilities, ballistic missiles, and warheads through U.S. Special Operations Force (SOF) direct

action ground attack, ballistic/cruise missile attack, and air strikes. North Korea experts postulate “that Pyongyang would not turn the other cheek and ignore an attack, as Syria did when Israel bombed its soon-to-be completed plutonium production reactor at Deir ez-Zor in 2007.”<sup>43</sup> Syria correctly assumed that the attack on its nuclear infrastructure was a limited strike on a single facility. Indications are that the DPRK would interpret a limited strike as the first salvo in a much greater conflict. And, regardless of how the regime interprets a limited strike against its nuclear and missile infrastructure, North Korea considers its nuclear capability essential to regime survival and could reasonably be expected to respond in kind.

### Regime Change

Another military option would be for the U.S. to force DPRK regime change through preventive military action. Although forcing regime change is contrary to current stated policy, the desired ends of this option would be to eliminate the Kim regime through conducting offensive major combat operations on the Korean Peninsula utilizing primarily the U.S. and ROK militaries. This option initiates with full-scale war and is fraught with numerous uncertainties and risks. What role would China play as the U.S. advances northward towards her border and what would happen post-conflict? Would regime collapse foment an insurgency? Do the U.S. people have the political will to support North Korean stabilization and re-construction? South Korea stands to suffer the most in this scenario and the South has not publicly indicated an appetite for any preventive U.S. military action, much less purposefully initiating the second Korean War.

### The Costs of War in North Korea

The costs of a preventive war with North Korea will produce greater casualties in a shorter period of time than has been experienced by the U.S. since World War II.

Conservative estimates predict “that in the first hours of a renewed military conflict, North Korean conventional artillery situated along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) could cause tens of thousands of casualties in South Korea, where at least 100,000 (and possibly as many as 500,000) U.S. soldiers and citizens reside.”<sup>44</sup> As the conflict expands and North Korea employs its nuclear, biological, and chemical capabilities the casualties will likely increase into the millions.<sup>45</sup> Other estimates go as far as predicting potential casualties in South Korea and Japan to “possibly tens of millions.”<sup>46</sup> If Russia or China engages in the conflict, the complications associated with preventive military action could spiral well beyond the region into a major power conflict.

### Conclusion

The Second Korean War is not imminent. The stakes on the Korean Peninsula are greater than ever; however, options other than war are available to the Trump Administration. The U.S. is not “running out of time” on the Korean Peninsula and must continue and enhance the current policy of strategic accountability to compel the DPRK to denuclearize, but be prepared to meet the challenge of deterring the DPRK’s nuclear aggression for the long term until the regime collapses or moderates. Therefore, the most promising strategic option for the U.S. and other allies is to continue pressuring North Korea through expanded sanctions, increasing military exercises and missile defense in the region, enacting a naval blockade/quarantine, leveraging China more effectively, and applying adept coercive diplomacy, in addition to maintaining nuclear deterrence. The U.S. and its partners must demonstrate the resolve to deter the Kim regime for the long-term. Nuclear deterrence is not without risk but it still has an undefeated record. Deterrence remains as the “least worst” of a bad set of options in North Korea.

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