

“Grown-ups” Versus “Ideologues”? The Media Narrative of the White House May Be All Wrong

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The Democrats and the media [love](#) the Pentagon generals in the White House. They are the “grown ups”:

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., had words of praise for Donald Trump’s new pick for national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster — calling the respected military officer a “certified, card-carrying grown-up,”

According to the main-stream narrative the “grown ups” are opposed by “[ideologues](#)” around Trump’s senior advisor Steve Bannon. Bannon is even infectious, according to Jeet Heer, as he is [Turning Trump Into an Ethno-Nationalist Ideologue](#). A recent [short interview](#) with Bannon dispels that narrative.

Who is really the sane person on, say, North Korea?

The “grown-up” General McMaster, Trump’s National Security Advisor, is not one of them. He claims North Korea is not deterrable from doing something insane.

STEPHANOPOULOS: But your predecessor Susan Rice wrote this week that the U.S. could tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea the same way we tolerated nuclear weapons in the Soviet Union far more during the Cold War. Is she right?MCMASTER: No, she’s not right. And I think the reason she’s not right is that the classical deterrence theory, how does that apply to a regime like the regime in North Korea? A regime that engages in unspeakable brutality against its own people? A regime that poses a continuous threat to the its neighbors in the region and now may pose a threat, direct threat, to the United States with weapons of mass destruction?

McMaster’s was spewing nonsense. The same was said about the Soviet Union and China when they became nuclear weapons states. North Korea just [became one](#). Conventional deterrence of both sides has worked with North Korea for decades. Nuclear deterrence with North Korea will work just as well as it did with the Soviet and Chinese communists. If North Korea were really not deterrable the U.S. should have nuked it yesterday to minimize the overall risk and damage. It is the McMaster position that is ideological and not rational or “grown up” at all.

Compare that to Steve Bannon's [take](#) on the issue:

"There's no military solution [to North Korea's nuclear threats], forget it. Until somebody solves the part of the equation that shows me that ten million people in Seoul don't die in the first 30 minutes from conventional weapons, I don't know what you're talking about, there's no military solution here, they got us."

It was indeed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea which "got" the United States and stopped the U.S. escalation game. It is [wrong to think](#) that North Korea "[backed off](#)" in the recent upheaval about a missile test targeted next to Guam. It was the U.S. that pulled back from threatening behavior.

Since the [end of May](#) the U.S. military trained extensively for decapitation and "preemptive" strikes on North Korea:

Two senior military officials — and two senior retired officers — told NBC News that key to the plan would be a B-1B heavy bomber attack originating from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.

...
Of the 11 B-1 practice runs since the end of May, four have also involved practice bombing at military ranges in South Korea and Australia.

In response to the B-1B flights North Korea published plans to launch a missile salvo next to the U.S. island of Guam from where those planes started. The announcement [included a hidden offer](#) to stop the test if the U.S. would refrain from further B-1B flights. A deal was made during [secret negotiations](#). Since then no more B-1B flights took place and North Korea [suspended](#) its Guam test plans. McMaster lost and the sane people, including Steve Bannon, won.

But what about Bannon's "ethno-nationalist" ideology? [Isn't he responsible](#) for the right-wing nutters of Charlottesville conflict? Isn't he one of them?

He dismissed the far right as irrelevant and sidestepped his own role in cultivating it: "Ethno-nationalism—it's losers. It's a fringe element. I think the media plays it up too much, and we gotta help crush it, you know, uh, help crush it more." "These guys are a collection of clowns," he added.

Bannon sees China as an economic enemy and wants to escalate an economic conflict with it. He is said to be against the nuclear deal with Iran. The generals in Trump's cabinet are all anti-Iran hawks. As Bannon now turns out to be a realist on North Korea, I am not sure what real position on Iran is.

Domestically Bannon is pulling the Democrats into the very trap I had several times warned against:

"The Democrats," he said, "the longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats."

This worked well during the presidential election and might continue to work for Trump. As long as the Democrats do not come up with, and fight for, sane economic policies they will continue to lose elections. The people are not interested in LGBT access to this or that bathroom. They are interested in universal healthcare, in personal and economic security. They are unlikely to get such under Bannon and Trump. But, unlike the Democrats, the current White House crew at least claim to have plans to achieve it.

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