

McMaster: U.S. Preparing for “Preventive War” with North Korea

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*The United States is preparing for all options to counter the growing threat from North Korea, [including launching a “preventive war,”](#) national security adviser **H.R. McMaster** said [in an interview that aired Saturday](#) on MSNBC. The comments come after North Korea carried out two tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the past month and after the president said he has been clear he will not tolerate North Korea’s threats to attack the U.S. with nuclear weapons.*

The key excerpts ([full transcript](#)):

H.H.: Let me switch if I can to North Korea, which is really pressing. And- and remind our audience, at the Aspen Institute ten days ago, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, **Joe Dunford**, said, “There’s always a military- option. It would be horrific.” **Lindsey Graham** on Today Show earlier this week said- “We need to destroy the regime and their deterrent.” **Secretary of State Rex Tillerson** said on Tuesday, I believe, to North Korea, “You are leaving us no choice but to protect ourselves.” And then the Chairman of the Chief of Staff of the Army said, “Just because every choice is a bad choice doesn’t mean you don’t have to choose.” **Are we looking at a preemptive strike? Are you trying to prepare us, you being collectively, the administration and people like Lindsey Graham and Tom Cotton for a first strike North Korea?**

H.R.M. **Well, we really, what you’re asking is- is are we preparing plans for a preventive war, right?** A war that would prevent North Korea from threatening the United States with a nuclear weapon. And the president’s been very clear about it. He said, “He’s not gonna tolerate North Korea being able to threaten the United States” if they have nuclear weapons that can threaten the United States; **It’s intolerable from the president’s perspective. So of course, we have to provide all options to do that. And that includes a military option.**

Now, would we like to resolve it short of what would be a very costly war, in terms of- in terms of the suffering of mainly the South Korean people? The- the ability of- of that North- North Korean regime to hold the South hostage to conventional fire’s capabilities, artillery and so forth, Seoul being so close. We’re cognizant of all of that. And so what we have to do is- is everything we can to- to pressure this regime, to pressure **Kim Jong-un** and those around him such that they conclude, it is in their interest to denuclearize. And there are really I think three critical things, came out of the president’s very successful summit with- **President Xi** of China that were different- that were different from past efforts to work with China, which has always been, you know, the- the desire, right, to work with China- on the- on the North Korean problem.

How many casualties will there be:

HH: In 1994, when the first North Korean deal with signed, the people who executed it, Gallucci, Dan Poneman, Joe Wit wrote a book. And they quoted a general saying, "If there is a conflict," called Going Critical, "there will be a million casualties." **A million casualties. Is that still a good estimate of what happens if- preemptive strike unfolds in North Korea, General?**

HRM: You know, one thing about war. **It's impossible oftentimes to predict. It's always impossible to predict the future course of events.** Because war is a continuous interaction of opposites, a continuous interaction between your forces and those of the enemy. It involves not just the capability to use force, but also intentions and things that are just unknowable at the outset. And so I think it's important to- to look at- range of estimates of what could happen, because it's clear that at war, it's unpredictable. And so you always have to ask the question, "What happens next? What are the risks? How do you mitigate those risks?" And- and obviously, you know, war is- is- is the most serious decision any leader has to make. And so what can we do to make sure we exhaust our possibilities and exhaust our other opportunities to accomplish this very clear objective of denuclearization of the peninsula short of war?

Should Americans be concerned:

HH: **How concerned should the American people be that we are actually on the brink of a war with North Korea?**

HRM: Well, **I think it's impossible to overstate the danger associated with this.** Right, the, so I think it's impossible to overstate the danger associated with a rogue, brutal regime, I mean, who murdered his own brother with nerve agent in an airport. "I mean, think about what he's done in terms of his own brutal repression of not only members of his regime but his own family," McMaster added.

On Tuesday, Sen. Lindsey Graham said that the [president told him there would be a war with North Korea](#) if the regime continues to try to hit America with an ICBM. Appearing on the Today Show, the South Carolina Republican Senator said that **President Trump** has indicated to him that the administration is prepared to strike North Korea to prevent an attack against the U.S. Pushed on by **Matt Lauer** on whether a viable military option exists in the region, Graham responded:

"They're wrong. There is a military option to destroy North Korea's program and North Korea itself."



The Hwasong-14 ICBM seen during its test in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in Pyongyang, July 5 2017.

As reported last Friday, North Korea claimed that its latest missiles can now strike anywhere in the United States, delivering nuclear warheads. Experts have said that the country's missile program has greatly accelerated in recent months putting it far ahead of previous predictions about when it could launch reliable long-range missiles. Speaking to [Newsweek in recent days](#), several experts said that an attack would be the deadliest the U.S. has ever received and potentially kill more than 100,000 people if it struck in large population centers

like New York City or Los Angeles.

“I’m not going to confirm [whether the latest ICBM could reach anywhere in the U.S.] but whether it could reach San Francisco or Pittsburgh or Washington, I mean how much does that matter? It’s a grave threat,” McMaster said.

He added:

“It’s impossible to overstate the danger associated with a rogue, brutal regime.”

McMaster cautioned that he was aware of the fact that any strike against North Korea could bring about a “very costly war” that would cause immense “suffering of mainly the South Korean people.”

Last month, CIA **Director Mike Pompeo** floated another option for dealing with the North Korea threat, saying that he was “hopeful we will find a way to separate that regime from this system.” North Korea responded by threatening swift and brutal consequences for any attempt to topple Kim.

“Should the U.S. dare to show even the slightest sign of an attempt to remove our supreme leadership, we will strike a merciless blow at the heart of the U.S. with our powerful nuclear hammer, honed and hardened over time,” a foreign ministry spokesman said.

Still, McMaster did not rule out such an attempt when asked whether it could be a legitimate tool.

“I think it depends on the legal justifications for that. And this goes back to just war theory. And what is the nature of the risk? And does that risk justify acting in defense of your people and your vital interests?”

Last week, the [local press reported](#) that South Korea’s military is preparing a “surgical strike” scenario that could wipe out North Korean command and missile and nuclear facilities following an order by S. Korea’s president **Moon Jae-In**.

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