

No One Man Should be Able to Trigger Nuclear War

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By [Eric Margolis](#)

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Amidst the rising clamor in the US over groping and goosing, America's Congress is beginning to fret about President Donald Trump's shaky finger being on the nation's nuclear button.

The air force officer that dutifully trails the president carries the electronic launch codes in a black satchel that could ignite a world war that would largely destroy our planet. This is rather more serious than groping and pinching.

The inexperienced Trump has talked himself into a corner over North Korea. He thought bombastic threats and a side deal with China could force the stubborn North Koreans to junk their nuclear weapons. Anyone with knowledge of North Asia could have told him this plan would not work.

Trump threatened North Korea with 'fire and fury' – a clear allusion to the use of nuclear weapons. The North Koreans mooned the tough-talking president and went ahead with their nuclear programs. So Trump's big bluff was called. A huge embarrassment for the amateur president who evaded military service in the 1960's.

On top of that, the wicked North Koreans referred to Trump as 'old.' He riposted that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was 'short and fat.' It is to this level of kindergarten invective that we have sunk – idiotic kids armed with nuclear weapons.

The problem for would-be warlord Trump is that he has few options left. His least bad are

1. attacking North Korea's nuclear infrastructure with tactical nuclear weapons,
or
2. laughing off the whole business, backing down and hoping that incoming Christmas and more groping furor will divert public attention.

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Responsible people in government are increasingly worried that President Trump might ignite nuclear war to salvage his bruised ego and to show the Asians who is boss. Trump

has already ringed North Korea with heavy bombers, strike aircraft, three heavy aircraft carriers and fleets of warplanes in Japan, South Korea and Guam.

A single incident – a naval clash, a mining, an air encounter – could set the stage for war. Senior US officers have been telling Trump the same message that this column has delivered for years: that North Korea's nuclear arsenal is unlikely to be destroyed by even a surprise nuclear attack.

The Pentagon admits that a ground invasion of North Korea would be far too costly. A decade-old Rand Corp study estimated US losses would be in the range of 250,000 men.

North Korea will probably retain enough nuclear-armed missiles in deep caves after a US nuclear attack to riposte against South Korea and Japan, where there are nearly 100,000 US troops and dependents. Japan, the world's third most important economic power, is totally vulnerable to nuclear devastation.

Nuclear-armed China and Russia are right next door to North Korea. Trump's threats to attack North Korea might force them to challenge the US in a major confrontation. The head of South Korea's ruling party just insisted that the US must not attack North Korea without her nation's prior consent – which will not likely be given.

Interestingly, few Americans know that in wartime, South Korea's powerful armed forces fall under command of a US four-star general. Such is the imperial order in North Asia.

Washington is planning large, new provocative military exercises around North Korea – just the type of sabre rattling that provoked the current crisis. China urged Washington to call off its warlike actions and, in exchange, for North Korea to stop testing nuclear warheads and missiles.

Sensible, of course, but Chief Crusader Trump rejects such plans and keeps sending mixed messages to the world. If he really wanted peace with North Korea all he would have to do is fly to Pyongyang, bury the hatchet, and shoot some rounds of golf with Kim Jong-un who would be thrilled to pieces.

This is unlikely to happen. Meanwhile, senior military officers and some in Congress who actually mastered high school are trying to figure out how to keep the volatile Trump away from the nuclear trigger.

According to the US Constitution, Congress has the power to declare war. But the president has a residual right to initiate military action in the event of a sudden threat. The fate of the globe cannot be left in the hands of one man. Even Russia and China require some checks and balances before nuclear war is unleashed. The US apparently does not.

Some senior officers say they would refuse to obey an illegal order. But none refused when it came to the unjustified attack on Iraq and war against Syria. In fact, the US nuclear attack system is designed to thwart interference with any orders to unleash war.

A no-first use pledge would be a positive step, to be sure. A better way would be for Congress to mandate a collegial decision to use nuclear weapons that would involve the president, vice president, secretary of state, chief of staff and chief justice. This, of course, would not apply if the US was under nuclear attack. But even certainty of attack can be

uncertain, as numerous nuclear crises during the cold war showed.

The urgent message of the day is: President Trump. Step away from that nuclear button and calm down.

[Eric Margolis](#) is a columnist, author and a veteran of many conflicts in the Middle East. Margolis recently was featured in a special appearance on Britain's Sky News TV as "the man who got it right" in his predictions about the dangerous risks and entanglements the US would face in Iraq. His latest book is [American Raj: Liberation or Domination?: Resolving the Conflict Between the West and the Muslim World](#).

Featured image is Trump in Cinema/Instagram.

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