

North Korea and the Unintended Consequences of Trump. Danger Looms. Bipartisan Appetite for War.

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There's something very strange and disturbing about the hype around the White House and US media's latest obsession with North Korea. It's not just the usual war-mongering and hot air though. We've seen all that before. This goes beyond sabre-rattling. There's something uncomfortably bipartisan about this new appetite for war.

Watching CNN this week, you got the impression we've entered a new comic book phase in the American experiment, driven by a 24 hour media environment where facts and analysis seem like a distant nostalgic hallucination. I asked myself, is it real? Where does the *show* finally end, and the war begin?

We're told that North Korea has now defied recent [threats](#) of "fire and fury" from US President Donald Trump, and that the regime has announced its plan to launch missiles at the nearest US territory, the island of Guam in the Pacific. So that's it. It's war then, right?

Trump's generals wasted no time throwing petrol on the fire, led by Defense Secretary Gen. James 'Mad Dog' Mattis who warned Kim Jong-Un that the US military "possess the most precise, rehearsed and robust defensive and offensive capabilities on Earth."

Whatever your views might be of Trump, North Korea, US foreign policy, or 'global security,' at this point we'd all do well to hit the breaks.

When one considers that North Korea has been making noises about the *American devil* and its puppet state South Korea, for the last 18 years – having done absolutely *nothing* about it during that time, then it's logical, at least for now, to conclude that Pyongyang either doesn't want to do anything about it, or more likely, simply cannot do anything about it. Unless of course, you buy into the US mythology about unstable rogue regimes and the constant reincarnation of the Hitler avatar. Saddam should have taught us that lesson already, but apparently not.

Is North Korea a threat to the United States and its allies? This is not the conclusion to which many sober foreign policy analysts have come.

Unfortunately, sober analysis is in short supply in Washington DC, but also in London and *Down Under* too. Emboldened by a media that is desperate for ad-generating eye balls (and the best way to generate ratings is by broadcasting a crisis, or fear-based narrative)

you then see wild statements like the one made by the Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull this week [assuring the US](#) that he would invoke the 'longstanding military alliance' with America in the event the North Korean regime attacked the US.

What's most dangerous about all of this is that no one is asking any questions.

The first question that needs to be answered in any intelligence briefing is: *what is the nature of the threat?*

Missile Threat?

Conveniently ignored by the entire US media and swamp alpha dogs, is the fact that there is no evidence to date that North Korea has an actual operational military ballistic missile program. No evidence suggests their test modules are capable of medium range strikes, let alone any intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability. In terms of ICBM capability - the ability to launch a missile into the outer atmosphere with a 10,000 km range - there exists no real indication that North Korea will have this ability in the near future. A series of recent botched tests (celebrated as ground-breaking by DPRK state media) of relatively short-range Hwasong-12 rockets (glorified Scud missiles) means North Korea cannot yet pose a physical threat to the US, unless of course, you are going by the colorful war graphics plastered all over Wolf Blitzer's ridiculous *Situation Room*, airing daily on the military industrial promotional network CNN.



Vice-Admiral-James-Syring (Source: [U.S. Department of Defense](#))

Still, US military officials are lining-up to confirm that the Kim regime can deliver on his threats, issuing a series of Orwellian statements along the way. Vice-Admiral James Syring, head of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, primed the media pump back in May, [stating](#),

“It is incumbent on us to assume that North Korea today can range the United States with an ICBM carrying a nuclear warhead.”

In other words, if the threat is not yet there, we need to make sure you think it is.

In typical dramatic style, Pyongyang [claimed](#) on July 4th (US Independence Day, no less) that it had conducted its first ICBM test, and that the test had been a resounding success. The missile was capable of reaching “anywhere in the world”, they said on state TV. The amazing thing is that the US media willingly bought it. To borrow a turn from Donald Trump, the media were suddenly “locked and loaded.”

Now for an example of just how mindless (or controlled) western journalism has become, rather than challenge the wild propaganda claim, *The Guardian's* man in Osaka, Justin McCurry, axiomatically [validated it](#):

“The claim was verified by the US secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, who described the test as “a new escalation of the threat to the United States, our allies and partners, the region and the world”.

At this point, anyone who has not dismissed the credibility of the comic book media outfit in Pyongyang cannot rightly call themselves a journalist, nor an ‘expert’ on the DPRK. This seems to be the new formula applied by the west: Pyongyang releases another bombastic, wishful statement, which is then elevated to credulity by an US official, before finally being codified by a western news desk as “official.” It’s enough to make heads spin at Stalin’s *Izvestia*. Back then, the average Soviet citizen knew *Izvestia* was pure tripe. Not so in today’s Anglo-American empire.

Again, another in a long list of examples of why the western mainstream media is no longer fit for purpose.

When this latest round of North Korea hype first broke out in June, all the focus was on the ICBM threat which “could hit San Diego.” Because of this glaring technical reality gap in the narrative, the international mainstream media machine has quickly compensated by simultaneously downgrading the threat to the continental USA and blowing-up the talking point that Kim will instead be [attacking the US military stronghold of Guam](#) instead. Their source? Well, it’s North Korea’s state-run propaganda bureau. Credible you say? After 18 years of nonstop nonsense from the Kim Dynasty, the answer should really be *no*, only for the western media, North Korea’s state-run KCNA is as good as gold (ratings gold). Again, we can confidently say that the mainstream corporate media is guilty of laundering DPRK propaganda, before spinning it into millions in advertising revenue at home, not to mention a nice little nudge for US military industrial share prices whose directors [also sit on the boards](#) of those same mainstream media outlets. Another little useful equation.

If you haven’t had an epiphany by this point, then you should consider moving to the DPRK.

There’s more. Pyongyang ‘confirms’:

“The Hwasong-12 rockets to be launched by the KPA will cross the sky above Shimane, Hiroshima and Koichi Prefectures of Japan.”

General Kim Rak Gyom, the head of the country’s strategic forces, took to the airwaves to assure his comrades that The Korean People’s Army (KPA) will complete its plans in mid-August, ready for the final order from *The Dear Leader*.

They also claim that although the missiles will head towards Guam, they actually ditch into

the sea about 18 to 25 miles before the island.

Guam is still 2,100 miles away from North Korea. If believed, North Korea's own Academy of Defence Science boasted that their best 'test' so far has only reached an altitude of 1,741 miles (2,802km), and flew a merger 580 miles - calling it their most 'successful missile test' to date. While this report could rightly be classed as DPRK propaganda, *The Guardian* still reinforced Pyongyang's claim, spinning it in spectacular fashion:

"The US initially described it as an intermediate-range missile but later conceded it was an ICBM."

Dazzling spin. If you didn't know better, you'd think that *The Guardian's* Osaka desk was wired into the Pentagon's communications department. Interestingly, buried at the bottom of their missile section of the report, you find this contradictory admission:

"John Schilling, a missile expert at the 38 North thinktank in Washington, estimates it will take until at least 2020 for North Korea to be able to develop an ICBM capable of reaching the US mainland, and another 25 years before it will be able to build one powered by solid fuel."

Not good for the narrative (it's worth noting that it took India more than 13 years to create an ICBM powered by solid fuel).

If you are brave enough to venture off the western media reservation, you will quickly learn from a number of different sources that these North Korean missile tests most likely did not have any guidance systems on board. Why not? Maybe because they haven't managed to develop any yet.

"Nobody really knows if they've managed to miniaturize the weapons to put on top of the missiles," said Robert Kelly, Associate Professor at Pusan National University in South Korea, telling [Quartz](#):

"It depends on miniaturization and guidance. The communist countries have traditionally not been good at guidance. That's why the Soviets built gigantic missiles, because they didn't know where they were going to land... My guess is that the North Koreans are not good at guidance. My guess is that when they start launching, a lot of them are just going to fall in the water."

What's worse than Pyongyang's state-generated bluster propaganda, is how the White House and the western media react to this as if it were a genuine news release. This fact alone should cause western electorates to seriously question the sanity of our media-driven narratives. But we see this familiar pattern time and time again - the US leadership and the western media mindlessly reacting to made-for-purpose propaganda, whether it's coming from Pyongyang, or from ISIS's *Amaq* news agency's press releases.

A Nuclear Threat?

Way back when, the topic of nuclear conflagration used to be treated with seriousness, but in today's America it's become something of a geopolitical sideshow. One reason for this could be for the US and Israel's determination to deflect away from any serious discussion

about nuclear disarmament, a concept which had achieved some political status in the 1980's but has steadily waned ever since Francis Fukuyama declared *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992.

On top of the fact that North Korea appears to have no operational (their series of failed, underwhelming 'tests' do not count as operational) medium range ballistic missile arsenal, and no proven long-range ICBM capability, there is also no discernible nuclear weapons capability.

Estimates vary on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. To date, the US has no hard intelligence on any operational nukes. Reports on their supposed nuclear detonation tests are equally as sketchy. So it seems near impossible at the present juncture to accurately verify just how far along North Korea is with their alleged WMD program. Most estimates are generated by Washington-based think tanks, and are based on how much fissile material they *might have*, which is based on how much highly enriched uranium it *may have* produced over the last decade.

The *Washington Post* even questioned the status of their nuclear arsenal back in 2013. When a former senior Obama administration official was asked if he had seen any actual evidence of any such weapons, his reply was strikingly vague, [stating](#),

"We're worried about it, but we haven't seen it."

Logic would dictate that we should only worry about the DPRK's nuclear weapons until such a time when we have some verifiable intelligence to suggest they have the means to build them. At the moment, a sane argument can be made that they do not.

Despite all this, The Guardian continues to stoke the public fear by proffering the following:

"Can anything be done to rein in North Korea's nuclear ambitions? At this point, the obvious response is no."

One thing that should be crystal clear to anyone by now is that a major component of the Kim regime's domestic legitimacy requires the state to remind its citizens that they are under constant threat from the US and neighboring allies, South Korea and Japan. Again, what Donald Trump and the US media are doing by amplifying the "fire and fury" rhetoric is tapping directly into the Kim propaganda mill. You could make the argument that there's a symbiosis between Washington and Pyongyang, a predictable tango of mutually assured public relations outcomes. How many times have we heard the old national security trope, "America takes these threats seriously. We're putting the enemy on notice." When this happens, it feeds directly into the DPRK newspeak machine, and so you see a predictable chain of events occur, all of which is turbo-charged by mainstream media spin.

'Being There'

Putting aside the issue of how China would react to an US strike near its border, there are a number of good reasons to pause and consider the consequences of any such action.

Here is where we shift gears, from TEAM America, to *Chauncey Gardiner*. Not to make light

of such a serious situation, but I still find myself asking whether there's not a man or woman around him who has either the clout or the stones to tap the President on the shoulder and calmly say, "Your excellency, a quick word if that's ok. Maybe ratcheting up the war rhetoric and threatening a preemptive strike in Asia may not be the best way to go about it this."

The impression one gets is that no such person exists in the President's inner circle, and if they did, he is not paying them any notice. Maybe he is genuinely still feeling insecure about how to communicate publicly on matters of state. After all, this is a unique experiment in itself - the country's first non-politician sitting in the chief executive's chair. This leads us back to one of Trump potential handicaps; he had signaled very early on in his campaign that he would be relying on "the generals" to make all of his important military decisions. At the time, this might have seemed like a prudent move back in 2016 when he was juxtaposed with the bevy of 16 'national security' savants standing to his right and his left on an overcrowded Republican debate stage. As the only one on the stage with no experience in public service or politics, it seemed like a tactical move for Trump; if you can't compete with *the swamp* purely on swamp credentials, then just dismiss that section of the résumé by deferring to the military brass, and thus bypassing faux hawks like Lindsey Graham who are constantly grandstanding, whilst pretending to know which war to start and when, or *Little Marco* shrieking on about going to war with everyone and Cuba, a dizzy Ben Carson, or Jeb Bush trying to defend his brother's epic failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the others - each competing for the crown of who's toughest on terror, ISIS and Russia. At the same time, Trump alluded to a clear shift away from a contiguous Clinton-Bush-Obama [R2P](#) policy, and towards a non-interventionist foreign policy. This was especially necessary early on in the campaign in order to knock out Jeb Bush, and distance oneself from the *Dubya* neocon stigma. However, by adopting a more *Paulish*, paleoconservative stance, Trump had indirectly declared war on the neoconservative Republican establishment and the *deep state* and their intelligence agency shadow steering committee, a faction which still remains at war with the President today. Come election time though, that didn't matter because Trump struck a chord with America's silent majority who were still embarrassed by the disastrous George W. Bush era, and even more disappointed by the Obama's continuance of it. That crowd responded with positive feedback for Trump which translated into votes and his eventual GOP nomination (something which perennial presidential losers like John McCain and Lindsey Graham may never fully understand). This was the making of Trump. Moving into the general election, he simply refashioned this same platform to exhibit contrast with a hopelessly hawkish Hillary Clinton. Again, that strategy worked for Trump, but he still never addressed what might be his fundamental flaw, namely, a lack of knowledge in international diplomacy and geopolitics. Instead, he did what any good business man does - he delegated, and doubled-down on *the generals*.



Gen. McMaster and Pres. Trump

The problem with all of *the generals* is that they are also career stakeholders in the previous military failures of the Clinton-Bush-Obama gestalt. With not a whistleblower among them (save for Gen. James Cartwright, skillfully indicted and ultimately [excommunicated](#) by Obama for whistleblowing on STUXNET), men like Gen. James Mattis, and Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, having presided over a series of illegal and disastrous wars in American history, suddenly find themselves in even higher decision-making positions than before. We can only pray they've all had a come to Jesus moment and hopefully developed some empathic qualities that may help avert further wars. So far, that doesn't appear to be the case. Given that Trump respects *the generals*, you'd expect that if the generals were telling him to calm down (and stop making an ass out of himself) then he wouldn't be popping-off like he has been. So it looks like *the generals* may not be telling Trump to hold it down. Maybe they are encouraging him to play the role of war hawk and all-round tough guy. Either way, it looks like it's back to square one for Trump – back to competing against sad individuals like Graham and McCain for the title of Most Flippant.

The Pro-War Left

On the other side of the aisle, we have something altogether more dangerous, a new fifth column in the United States. The new [anti-antiwar left](#) that has been carefully groomed during eight years of the Obama Odyssey, nudged into their current position by the ungodly neoliberal-neocon chimera led by Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, and flanked by Susan Rice, Samantha Power, wholly endorsed by John McCain, and backed-up by the terrible tandem of Victoria Nuland and Robert Kagan, and so on. These are the people leading the call for what seems like [an endless list of military interventions](#). What should worry concerned citizens is that this unholy alliance is now completely bipartisan.

Robert Parry from *Consortium News* [illustrates](#) the level of political gymnastics involved in this ideological inversion:

“Since the neocons’ emergence as big-time foreign policy players [in the Reagan administration](#), they also have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, receiving a steady flow of money often through U.S. government-funded grants from organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy and through donations from [military contractors to hawkish neocon think tanks](#).”

“But neocons’ most astonishing success over the past year may have been how they have pulled liberals and even some progressives into the neocon strategies for war and more war, largely by exploiting the Left’s disgust with President Trump.”

Their victory over the old antiwar left was achieved through the construct of the Arab Spring and by a relentless media disinformation campaign which suffocated any logical and non-orientalist discourse around interventions in Libya and Syria, and also around Afghanistan which turned out to be NATO’s first unofficial [feminist war](#) (where arguably, women and children are [worse off in 2017](#) than before the US invasion on 2002).

So well-trained the new anti-antiwar left has become, that when Donald Trump launched his errant cruise missile attack on Syria, it [was met with cheers and congratulations](#) by Trump’s liberal critics and the robotic pundits at CNN and in US mainstream media. Hence, Trump’s

lesson: aggressive war action equals a bounce in the polls. There was a method to their madness however. In their infinitely myopic geopolitical view, American progressives worked out a rudimentary equation in their heads: because the Syria government is closely allied with Russia, then anything which was bad for Damascus was also bad for Putin and Moscow. Granted, that might sound a bit like *Simple Jack* foreign policy, but that's the intelligence level which most Democrats and 'progressives' are working on at the moment.

Another consequence of Trump *being there*, is that the political left in America have lost their minds and are still relying on the elaborate Russiagate [conspiracy theory](#) for their resurrection. Just ask Adam Schiff. If the left truly opposed Trump, it would have been a good opportunity to pin him down on the fact that the US had no evidence of a chemical attack in Khan Sheikhun, Idlib, but instead they passed on it.

Similarly, you would think that Democrats would have learned their lesson in Syria (a 7 year proxy war which the US has now lost), and use Trump's bellicose outbursts over North Korea as a real opportunity to at least *pose* as genuine opposition, but again, no such luck. Parry explains how the border of this left-right maze is constructed:

"People who would normally favor international cooperation toward peaceful resolution of conflicts have joined the neocons in ratcheting up global tensions and making progress toward peace far more difficult.

The provocative "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act," which imposes sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea while tying President Trump's hands in removing those penalties, passed the Congress without a single Democrat voting no.

The only dissenting votes came from three Republican House members - Justin Amash of Michigan, Jimmy Duncan of Tennessee, and Thomas Massie of Kentucky - and from Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky and Independent Bernie Sanders of Vermont in the Senate.

In other words, every Democrat present for the vote adopted the neocon position of escalating tensions with Russia and Iran. The new sanctions appear to close off hopes for a *détente* with Russia and may torpedo the nuclear agreement with Iran, which would put the bomb-bomb-bomb option back on the table just where the neocons want it."

If you are hoping that this new bipartisan war consensus will change any time soon, don't hold your breath. Unless the American 'left' or *progressives* actually wake up and realize how far out to sea they've drifted on the issue of war, then Washington will be locked into a new normal for the foreseeable future.

The danger of this current North Korean war plan is the level of political inertia pushing it. Like in 1914, when no one thought it could happen, and when it began, no one knew how to stop it.

The good news (well, sort of) is that Rex Tillerson seems to be prone to making intermittent statements which resemble sanity. When the war volume was reaching fever pitch on August 2nd, the Secretary of State weighed in [saying](#),

"We do not seek a regime change; we do not seek the collapse of the regime; we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula; we do not seek

an excuse to send our military north of the 38th parallel.”

If the rest of the Administration could adopt this tone now and again, it would go a long way towards reducing public anxiety.

Perhaps Trump’s hawkishness will reawaken the moral core of American antiwar movement.

All of these outcomes could end up being the unintended consequences of Trump.

As for the US media, so far we can see there are no Tillerson-types around.

By now, we should all have learned the lesson: mainstream media, not politics, is the true engine of war.

Watch Patrick Henningsen’s recent lecture for ‘Media on Trial’ in the UK:

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