

Trump Springs the Neocon Trap Again: North Korea's 'Test' Is No Act of War

Here we go again. There seems to be no end to the escalation of tensions between North Korea and the United States and its allies.

By [Patrick Henningsen](#)

Global Research, September 05, 2017

[21st Century Wire](#) 4 September 2017

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD](#), [US NATO](#)

[War Agenda](#)

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Yesterday, Pyongyang's state broadcaster [came out declaring](#) what it claims was another 'successful test', this time with a hydrogen bomb, which they say could be mounted on to their still as yet nonexistent intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

Seizing the moment, state news anchor **Ri Chun Hee** proudly announced that the test was a "perfect success," and symbolises the country's final step on the long road to attaining a "state nuclear force." All very exciting.

Still, there has been no independent verification of the claim, but why let that get in the way of a promising international security crisis?



Kim Jung Un: Looking at shiny objects, pointing, generally looking busy.

North Korea's alleged 'test' is said to have happened just [hours](#) after Pyongyang state-run media released images of leader **Kim Jong Un** 'inspecting' (looking, pointing) something which looks like it could be a hydrogen bomb, but no one is really sure.

We're also told that this was "ready to be placed on top of an ICBM," however no one has actually seen a real operational ICBM yet. That's kind of an important detail in this grand plot, but one which is routinely overlooked by legions of western mainstream 'experts' on CNN and NBC. So far, the DPRK only has a series of botched tests of their short-range

Hwasong-12 rockets (glorified Scud missiles) to show the world. Still, the western media insist that this constitutes a potential threat to the US.

So *confident* was this mainstream media outlet, that they've seemed to have hedged their bets on the authenticity of the DPRK state claims, leaving the offending 'H Bomb' in quotes...

FINANCIAL TIMES

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Ethical investing is booming in emerging markets — BIG READ, PAGE 9

Great mall of China
The man behind Alibaba's busiest shopping day — INTERVIEW, PAGE 24

Trump opens door to attack on North Korea after 'H-bomb' test

◆ 10 times more powerful than previous devices ◆ China and Russia join global criticism

BY DAN HARRIS AND SONG JUNG-A — SEOUL, SAN FLEMING — WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has lashed out after North Korea's latest nuclear weapons test, declaring the rebel nation's actions as "hostile and dangerous" to the US and leaving open the possibility of a military attack against Pyongyang.

North Korea yesterday said it had tested a hydrogen bomb capable of being mounted on a ballistic missile that was a "perfect success". The test, estimated to be about 10 times more powerful than previous detonations, triggered a magnitude 6.3 earthquake.

The move provoked a strong reaction from the Chinese and Russian presidents yesterday, who were speaking on the sidelines of a G20 summit in China. Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin agreed to "appropriately deal with" the latest test, while Mr Xi went on to tell the summit that the group was "committed to upholding global peace and contributing to the international security order".

In Europe, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said North Korea's provocations had "reached a new dimension".

The move by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is the latest escalation of defiance to the international community, particularly the US, amid rising concern that Pyongyang is getting closer to being able to hit the US with an intercontinental ballistic missile.

When asked by a reporter if the US would attack North Korea, the US president said: "No. Yes."

Mr Trump last month warned of "fire and fury" if Pyongyang continued to threaten the US after North Korea test-fired two long-range missiles in July.

Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin said the US would continue to apply economic pressure by putting together a package of new sanctions that would potentially cut off all global trade with Pyongyang.

China has the option of cutting off North Korea's oil supply but has been

Briefing

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- ◆ **Staff and pay plea from data watchdog**
Information commissioner Elizabeth Denham has called for more staff on better pay to prepare for tough new rules and overcome public anxiety over personal data use. — PAGE 1
- ◆ **Call to lift debt ceiling for Harvey relief**
Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin has called on Congress to lift the US debt ceiling at the same time as passing an aid package for storm victims, saying relief funding could otherwise be held up. — PAGE 4
- ◆ **Minister vows to reshape French welfare**
Labour minister Mariel Pink has pledged to overhaul France's welfare system in two years, saying last week's labour reforms are only the first of a series of plans to tackle unemployment. — PAGE 4
- ◆ **Frankfurt evacuation to defend RAF bomb**
More than 60,000 people had to be evacuated from the city to allow authorities to defuse a 1.8-tonne "black-bomb" bomb dropped by Britain's Royal Air Force during the second world war. — PAGE 4

Datavatch

Back to school
% of budget allocation

Category	Low-spender	High-spender
Computers & hardware	~15%	~35%
Electronic gadgets	~10%	~25%
Clothing & accessories	~25%	~15%
School supplies	~15%	~10%
Other	~35%	~15%

Source: iDatebit, Aug 2017



Kim Jong Un inspecting what was said to be a hydrogen bomb

North Korea's state news agency KCNA yesterday posted pictures of Mr Kim inspecting what it claimed was a hydrogen bomb and reported that he had watched it being loaded on to an intercontinental ballistic missile.

The tremor was stronger than those created by the regime's five previous tests. South Korea's parliamentary defence committee estimated the device had a yield of up to 100 kilotons.

South Korea condemned the test and put its nuclear crisis team into operation while Japan and China said they were monitoring radiation levels.

South president Moon Jae-in called for diplomatic pressure to force Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear programme, but Mr Trump criticised Seoul's response, saying South Korea's "talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing".

Bong Young-shik, an authority on North Korea at Seoul's Yonsei University, said the regime now believed the White House's rhetoric was "dull".

"Kim Jong Un now understands that Washington does not have the ability to crank up its maximum pressure strategy any further," he said.

Additional reporting by Gabriel Wildau in Shanghai, Robin Harding in Tokyo and Desmetri Sevastopoulou in Washington
Book review: *North Korea economy* page 10

bother to do so due to fears it would trigger a refugee crisis.

Mr Trump yesterday tweeted: "North Korea is a regime nation which has become a great threat and embarrassment to China, which is trying to help but with little success."

Kim Jong Un has humiliated China president Xi Jinping, the one leader with power to strangle North Korea's economy with potentially fatal effects for the regime

This wouldn't be the first time North Korea exaggerated its WMD credentials. Last January they [exaggerated claims](#) of a successful 'H-bomb' test. Despite their dodgy record, the western media, and politicians who are fed by defense contracts - are lapping up Pyongyang's latest pig's breakfast.

Whatever this latest test was, it's hardly an *act of war*.

Meanwhile, South Korea wasted no time retaliating by showing off its new toys purchased out of its US dollar reserve account, launching multiple missiles for the cameras. Seoul insists that it's ready to activate four Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile batteries. It also carried out a major joint drill (likely pre-planned anyway) with F-15K fighter jets and surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. This posturing by South Korea has excited the western media to no end. Everyone is loving it, because nothing brings eye balls and ratings like a good crisis.

[Guardian](#) reporter **Justin McCurry** confirms:

“[South Korea](#) has carried out a simulated attack on North Korea’s nuclear test site in a huge show of force in response to Pyongyang’s detonation of what it claims is a hydrogen bomb.

Seoul has also approved the complete deployment of a US anti-missile system in another sign that it intends to address North Korean provocations with reminders of its own military firepower, while keeping the door open to dialogue.”

You can be certain that CNN absolutely loves this latest ‘crisis’ too, [wailing](#) this morning:

“South Korea strengthened the deployment of a controversial US-made missile defense system and launched a huge show of military might on Monday in response to North Korea’s hydrogen bomb test.”

Naturally, not a word of condemnation from the western media about South Korea’s real provocations – broadcast in colour around the world.

How Serious is the Threat?

At the time of publishing this piece, members of the UN Security Council are already convening emergency sessions about what to do next. In the final analysis, there will have to be some clear and present threat in order to justify some harsh response from the UNSC.

Can such a rational evaluation be made with so much theatre on both sides?

Washington’s UN **Ambassador Nikki Haley** gave a predictable hawkish speech claiming that,

“He is begging for war.”

Of course Haley is all too eager to oblige.

Once again, western media outlets are treating claims by North Korea’s state-run KCNA media agency as ‘good as gold’ (ratings gold, that is).

For the US, this latest move by North Korea has been PR gold. It’s helped to revive and reenergize the dying conversation of a nuclear standoff between ‘The Good Guys’ and ‘The Bad Guys.’

And to deal with those bad guys, you need *tough guys*.

Enter US **Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin**, who swiftly moved in with “tough new sanctions” against the DPRK, warning that “this isn’t the time for just talk.” A novel approach.

Eager to win back some approval points and stop the political *hemorrhaging* that seems to be draining all of the mojo Trump had when he whipped-up the campaign trail crowds

promising to 'drain the swamp,' the President took to Twitter, to do what he thinks his base wants, which is to be Kim's 'bad cop'.

Kim and The Donald, two iconic frontmen, both being played like a marionette by "the generals" off camera.

Cue Trump...

"North Korea has conducted a major Nuclear Test. Their words and actions continue to be very hostile and dangerous to the United States," wrote Trump.

Tough.

"North Korea is a rogue nation which has become a great threat and embarrassment to China, which is trying to help but with little success. South Korea is finding, as I have told them, that their talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing!"

Tougher.

Trump also tries to slam the door shut on any chance of bilateral negotiations:

South Korea is finding, as I have told them, that their talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [September 3, 2017](#)

Toughest.

Of course, Trump's comments appear to be winding up Pyongyang. A vicious circle of fighting talk. Are there any adults left in the room?

Not to be outdone, here comes a 'good cop.' Enter US **Defense Secretary James 'Mad Dog' Mattis**, who is still earning his nickname meant to resemble an unstable, rabid house pet. After his meeting with **President Trump** and **Vice President Mike Pence** on Sunday, the Mad Dog, wearing a purple tie (the same colour as Hillary's revolution), read his military decree on the White House lawn:

"We have many military options, and the president wanted to be briefed on each one of them. We made clear that we have the ability to defend ourselves and our allies, South Korea and Japan, from any attack, and our commitments among the allies are ironclad," said Mattis.

What a relief, he sounds moderate compared to Trump. *But wait...*

Before exiting the podium, he said:

"We are not looking to the total annihilation of a country, namely North Korea,

but as I said, we have many options to do so.”

This is a unique breed of lunatic.

Talking tough, and talking of “options” for “annihilating” a country. Normal people would say this is an idiotic proposition because the fall-out would be much worse than any of Kim apocalyptic sabre rattling. All this looks very familiar. Quite simply, what we are seeing here in Washington is Neoconservatism reasserting itself through one of its flagship planks – the *preemptive strike*. Above all other military strategies, this is always the most favorable for the Pentagon because it doesn’t require any real justification or accountability for a preemptive action. All that’s required is a sufficient amount of media fear-mongering and political hype about “the threat we all face” and how “we must act” – and then simply fire away and sift through the rubble, reforming the narrative afterwards. In the meantime, the ruling parties can call it a success, and claim that “many lives were saved by this valiant action” etc. It’s clean and straightforward, albeit in the short term, but extremely messy in the long term.

As much as hawks in Washington would love to test out their new toys right now, a conflagration is not likely to happen by the hand of the US in the Pacific Rim. There are too many powerful players in the immediate vicinity (South Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Philippines... and Russia, too) and the fall-out from any rash US-led geopolitical pissing contest, ‘surgical’ or *kinetic* action could be detrimental to all parties. Better to get someone else to start it for them, but that’s not easy either.

There was a time when people had high hopes for Mattis. He was affectionately referred to as the “warrior monk,” with many FOX News pundits drooling over his apparent **Sun Tzu** prowess, as was rumoured that he has actually read some historical books and was “really smart” and “really wise” – apparently a rarity in Washington military circles these days. But no matter how many books people think he’s read about the Peloponnesian Wars, it’s should be pretty clear by now that Mattis, like his predecessor **Ash Carter**, is acting as kind of an executive sales rep for the military industrial complex. That’s essentially what the position of Defense Secretary has become in America. It’s a straightforward deal: you’ll keep your job, as long as you do and say what’s required to keep international tensions high at all times. This translates into profits, and shareholder dividends for industry stakeholders. If you’re not with the program, then you’ll have to tender your resignation. Just ask **Chuck Hagel**.

What Americans should really understand is that “the generals” with whom Trump is so enamored, and who he trusts with all our bombs and silos – have left nothing but a string of military failures in their wake. Between Generals **James Mattis** and **Major General H.R. McMaster**, you have a collective 30 plus years and two of the worst military and foreign policy boondoggles in US history, Afghanistan and Iraq, underscored by successive failed “surges.” Add to these, a total defeat in Syria, blowing billions of US taxpayer dollars on a proxy war that’s arguably created a new generation of Islamist extremists (although no one will admit it). Impressive, isn’t it? So why do the media continue to elevate the military brass?

Not every General is a good general. As with any other position or profession, some are good, and some are corrupt, and many are incompetent, or promoted for *playing ball*. **General David Petraeus** is a good example of this. The media can’t get enough of

him. He was “the architect of the surge” we’re told, which means he was around when Obama-Bush ordered up another 30,000 troops for Iraq in a futile effort to fix what they broke. Still, the media will bend over backwards in an almost worshipful mode whenever his name is mentioned, forgetting that [Petraeus was found guilty](#) of the [same crime](#) for which half of America wanted Hillary Clinton locked-up. Despite bringing his name and his office into disrepute, Petraeus was rewarded board positions with mega Wall Street firms like [KKR](#), and a perennial seat at Bilderberg.

Men like Mattis, McMaster and Petraeus can, and will run rings around this President who has already signaled his weakness for those chevrons on the shoulder. And, this President will happily defer *everything* to these men.

Should we be surprised if they keep getting it wrong?

Let’s just pray that they don’t get it wrong with North Korea, too.

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