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## Nuclear Brinkmanship: Trump's Belligerent Policy on North Korea

By Binoy Kampmark  
April 18, 2017



Warring toddlers, fanatical children, one-eyed adolescents who confuse noise with constructive contribution – this is the state of the world, with the recent, and ongoing spat chapter of Washington and Pyongyang.

However you wish to describe the stout, proud and foolishly dangerous Kim Jong-un, murderous leader of North Korea, comparisons must diminish somewhat before the trigger happy CEO of

United States Inc, known as The Donald. Both are in a tussle of theatre and force, and the audience is hoping that this remains such. Between the two countries, after all, only one has ever used the atomic weapon on civilian populations.

The face off between the two resembles a popgun holder against an overly endowed tank, though the popgun holder has threatened to up the quality of his ordnance through ceremonial self-praise and image. There are promised missile launches, promised nuclear tests.

From Washington's side, the response was quirkily mad ahead of the weapons test scheduled by the regime in Pyongyang to commemorate the "Day of the Sun" – the 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the DPRK's founder, Kim Il-sung. Last Thursday, Trump insisted that Pyongyang was a problem that "will be taken care of", dumping China's President Xi Jinping in the mess of working "very hard" to clean up the mess.

As the US flotilla, led by the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier, powered towards the peninsula, the North's KCNA agency made the emphatic point that the US had introduced "into the Korean peninsula, the world's biggest hotspot, huge nuclear strategic assets, seriously threatening peace and security of the peninsula and pushing the situation there to the brink of war." [1]

Even before a single shot had been fired, Trump had suggested the possibility of a strike against targets in the north. Misbehave, Pyongyang, at your peril. The NBC news report outlining the claims of such a pre-emptive conventional weapons strike on North Korean targets were subsequently dismissed as "flat wrong" by an unnamed "senior Trump administration". [2]

Not to be outdone, US Vice President Mike Pence has insisted during a visit to the Demilitarised Zone at Camp Bonifas that all policy options, like a vast and limitless smorgasbord, should be on the table. Yes, the US and its allies would seek to attain objectives through "peaceable means" though he was clear that "ultimately by whatever means are necessary" should also figure.

The "era of strategic patience," Pence insisted, was over. "We want to see North Korea abandon its reckless path of the development of nuclear weapons, and also its continual use and testing of ballistic missiles is unacceptable." Such a view was actually expressed at a *failed* missile test, keeping the world in suspense as to what would happen if the next round of North Korean tests prove to be hunky dory.

As with everything with the Trump administration, qualified voices can also be found amidst the loudness. National Security advisor, HR McMaster, insisted, despite noting the "tough decisions" Trump had made on the use of force against Syria, that it was "time for us to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to resolve this peacefully." Less in terms of choice, it would seem, on that smorgasbord.

Where there is muscle, there is credibility, though where that muscle is applied remains the true test of statesmanship. In the not so wise context of Trumpist behaviour, muscle is detached from sentience and cognition, to be applied only in the context of making a deal, ploughing in and hoping for the best. Unfortunately for Trump and much of his ilk, it is hard to imagine receivership and bankruptcy in a nuclear obliterated landscape.

For Kim Jong-un, credibility, like a mythical figure of enormous sexual prowess, has to be faked. He must claim to have weapons he does not have, means he can never possess. The ability to give an orgasm is paraded as being stupendous. Much of this theatrical posturing has to be put down to an emperor who has long ago feared that the clothes have fallen off, if, indeed, they were ever there in even slightly tattered form. This is an impoverished state made more, rather than less dangerous, in the rhetorical sniping that is now taking place.

Little thought is openly given to the very fact that the US remains the greatest enemy, and alibi, of North Korean conduct. In a peninsula still technically at war, there never having been a formal peace treaty signed, the conduct of Washington post-September 11, 2001 remains an object lesson for the state.

The invasion of Iraq for not having weapons of mass destruction, or the destruction of Qaddafi's Libya in 2011, provide the colourful background to Pyongyang's wishes to have a functioning nuclear capability.

Whether it is a totalitarian entity redolent with images of false achievement and actual desperation, or a Republic which has decided to abandon any pretext for orthodox diplomacy, both are perversely well matched in the word stakes, but dangerously poised to take it to a logical conclusion.

It is such behaviour that has made such veterans as former Army Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson dribble with fear that something exceptional will take place. "I've been through the Cuban missile crisis, I've been through the Bay of Pigs before that, Vietnam War, the two Iraq wars and so forth. And I've got to tell you, though, I've never been so concerned, as I am now, for the state of this country and world relations." [3] (The previous imperial bashes were evidently tolerable for US Inc.)

It is with some relief that the little tub of misguided emotions managed to see his project explode in mid-experiment, possibly with US cyber intervention, but it would have also given much dark amusement to have seen the US military misfire in its imperial presumption. The cult of war continues to enchant those who know little of it.

#### **Notes.**

[1] <http://www.jpost.com/American-Politics/Senior-Trump-Official-Reports-of-preemptive-North-Korea-strike-flat-wrong-487000>

[2] <http://www.jpost.com/American-Politics/Senior-Trump-Official-Reports-of-preemptive-North-Korea-strike-flat-wrong-487000>

[3] <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/328973-former-army-colonel-ive-never-been-so-concerned-about-us-world>