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Why Trump Won't Start a War With North Korea

By Mike Whitney
September 8, 2017

Donald Trump isn't going to start a war with North Korea. That's just not going to happen.

Not only does the United States not have the ground forces for such a massive operation but, more important, a war with the North would serve no strategic purpose at all. The US already has the arrangement it wants on the Peninsula. The South remains under US military occupation, the economic and banking systems have been successfully integrated into the US-dominated western system, and the strategically-located landmass in northeast Asia provides an essential platform for critical weapons systems that will be used to encircle and control fast-emerging rivals, China and Russia.

So what would a war accomplish?

Nothing. As far as Washington is concerned, the status quo is just dandy.

And, yes, I realize that many people think Trump is calling the shots and that he is an impulsive amateur who might do something erratic that would trigger a nuclear conflagration with the North. That could happen, but I think the possibility is extremely remote. As you might have noticed, Trump has effectively handed over foreign policy to his generals, and those generals are closely aligned to powerful members of the foreign policy establishment who are using Trump's

reputation as a loose cannon to great effect. For example, by ratchetting up the rhetoric, (“fire and fury”, “locked and loaded”, etc) Trump has managed to stifle some of the public opposition to the deployment of the THAAD missile system which features “powerful AN/TPY-2 radar, that can be used to spy on Chinese territory, and the interceptors are designed to protect US bases and troops in the event of nuclear war with China or Russia.”

THAAD is clearly not aimed at North Korea which is small potatoes as far as Washington is concerned. It’s an essential part of the military buildup the US is stealthily carrying out to implement its “pivot to Asia” strategy.

Trump’s belligerence has also prompted a response from the North which has accelerated its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons testing. The North’s reaction has stirred up traditional antagonisms which has helped to undermine the conciliatory efforts of liberal President Moon Jae-in. At the same time, the North’s behavior has strengthened far-right groups that –among other things– want to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in the South. By playing to the right wing and exacerbating hostilities between North and South, Trump has helped to fend off efforts to reunify the country while creating a justification for continued US military occupation. In other words.

The crisis has clearly tightened Washington’s grip on the peninsula while advancing the interests of America’s elite powerbrokers. I seriously doubt that Trump conjured up this plan by himself. This is the work of his deep state handlers who have figured out how to use his mercurial personality to their advantage.

A Word About North Korea’s Nukes

Leaders in North Korea don’t want to blow their money on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles when their people are on the brink of starvation. But what choice do they have? The primary responsibility of every government is to provide security for their people. That’s hard to do when the nation is still technically at war with a country that has toppled or tried to topple 50 sovereign governments in the last 70 years. The Korean War did not end with a treaty, it ended with an armistice which means the war is ongoing and could flare up at any time. And Washington won’t sign a treaty with the North because it despises their form of government, and is just waiting for the opportunity to force them from power. Trump is no different from most of his predecessors in this regard. He hates the leadership in Pyongyang and makes no bones about it.

Bottom line: The US refuses to provide the North with any written guarantees that it won’t resume hostilities, kill its people and blow their cities to smithereens. So, naturally, the North has taken steps to defend itself. And, yes, Kim Jong-in fully realizes that if he ever used his nukes in an act of aggression, the United States would –as Colin Powell breezily opined– “turn the North into a charcoal briquette.” But Kim is not going to use his nukes because he has no territorial ambitions nor does he have any driving desire to be subsumed into a fiery ball of ash. His nukes are merely bargaining chips for future negotiations with Washington. The only problem is that Trump doesn’t want to bargain because US geopolitical interests are better served by

transforming a few pathetic missile tests into an Armageddon-type drama. No one knows how to exploit a crisis better than Washington.

Does Trump know anything about the history of the current crisis? Does he know that North Korea agreed to end its nuclear weapons program in 1994 if the US met its modest demands? Does he know that the US agreed to those terms but then failed to hold up its end of the bargain? Does he know that the North honored its commitments under the agreement but eventually got tired of being double-crossed by the US so they resumed their plutonium enrichment program? Does he know that that's why the North has nuclear weapons today, because the United States broke its word and scotched the agreement?

That's not conjecture. That's history.

Here's a clip from an article in the Independent that provides a brief outline of the so called Framework Agreement:

“Under the terms of the 1994 framework, North Korea agreed to freeze and ultimately dismantle its nuclear programme in exchange for “the full normalisation of political and economic relations with the United States”. This meant four things:

By 2003, a US-led consortium would build two light-water nuclear reactors in North Korea to compensate for the loss of nuclear power.

Until then, the US would supply the north with 500,000 tons per year of heavy fuel.

The US would lift sanctions, remove North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and – perhaps most importantly – normalise the political relationship, which is still subject to the terms of the 1953 Korean War armistice.

Finally, both sides would provide “formal assurances” against the threat or use of nuclear weapons.” (“Why America’s 1994 deal with North Korea failed – and what Trump can learn from it”, The Independent)

It was a totally straightforward agreement that met the requirements of both parties. The North got a few economic perks along with the security assurances they desperately wanted and, in return, the US got to monitor any and all nuclear sites, thus, preventing the development of weapons of mass destruction. Everyone got exactly what they wanted, right? There was only one glitch: The US started foot-dragging from Day 1. The lightwater reactors never got beyond the foundation stage and the heavy fuel deliveries got more and more infrequent. In contrast, the North Koreans stuck religiously to the letter of the agreement. They did everything that was expected of them and more. In fact, according to the same article, four years after the agreement went into effect:

“both the US and the international atomic energy agency were satisfied that there had been ‘no fundamental violation of any aspect of the framework agreement’ by North Korea. But on its own pledges, Washington failed to follow through.” (Independent)

There you have it: The North kept its word, but the US didn't. It's that simple.

This is an important point given the fact that the media typically mischaracterizes what actually took place and who should be held responsible. The onus does not fall on Pyongyang, it falls on Washington. Here's more from the same article:

“On its own pledges, Washington failed to follow through. The light-water reactors were never built. ...Heavy fuel shipments were often delayed....North Korea was not removed from the state department's list of state sponsors of terrorism until 2008, though it had long met the criteria for removal....Most importantly, no action was taken to formally end the Korean War – which was never technically ended – by replacing the 1953 ceasefire with a peace treaty. The “formal assurances” that the US would not attack North Korea were not provided until six years after the framework was signed.” (Independent)

When Bush was elected in 2000, things got much worse. The North was included in Bush's the Axis of Evil speech, it was also listed as a “rogue regime against which the US should be prepared to use force”, and the Pentagon stepped up its joint-military drills in the South which just added more gas to the fire. Eventually, Bush abandoned the agreement altogether and the North went back to building nukes.

Then came Obama who wasn't much better than Bush, except for the public relations, of course. As Tim Shorrock points out in his excellent article at The Nation, Obama sabotaged the Six-Party Talks, suspended energy assistance to pressure the North to accept harsher “verification plans”, “abandoned the idea of direct talks” with Pyongyang, and “embarked on a series of military exercises with South Korea that increased in size and tempo over the course of his administration and are now at the heart of the tension with Kim Jong-un.”

So although Obama was able to conceal his cruelty and aggression behind the image of “peacemaker”, relations with the North continued to deteriorate and the situation got progressively worse.

Check out these brief excerpts from Shorrock's article which help to provide a thumbnail sketch of what really happened and who is responsible:

“The Agreed Framework led North Korea to halt its plutonium-based nuclear-weapons program for over a decade, forgoing enough enrichment to make over 100 nuclear bombs. “What people don't know is that North Korea made no fissile material whatsoever from 1991 to 2003.”

“...the framework remained in effect well into the Bush administration. In 1998, the State Department's Rust Deming testified to Congress that “there is no fundamental violation of any aspect of the framework agreement.”

“...Pyongyang was prepared to shut down its development, testing, and deployment of all medium- and long-range missiles.”

“By 1997...the North Koreans were complaining bitterly that the United States was slow to deliver its promised oil and stalling on its pledge to end its hostile policies...”

“It was against this backdrop—Pyongyang’s growing conviction the US was not living up to its commitments—that the North in 1998 began to explore” other military options.”

“Bush tore up the framework agreement, exacerbating the deterioration in relations he had sparked a year earlier when he named North Korea part of his “axis of evil” in January 2002. In response, the North kicked out the IAEA inspectors and began building what would become its first bomb, in 2006, triggering a second nuclear crisis that continues to this day.” (“Diplomacy With North Korea Has Worked Before, and Can Work Again”, Tim Shorrock, The Nation)

Now the North has hydrogen bombs and Washington is still playing its stupid games. This whole fake crisis is a big smokescreen designed to conceal Washington’s imperial machinations. Trump is using Kim’s missile tests as a pretext to extend the Pentagon’s military tentacles deeper into Asia so the US can assume a dominant role in the world’s fastest growing region. It’s the same game Washington has been playing for the last hundred years. Unfortunately, they’re pretty good at it.