

## Articles on the US-North Korea crisis ( II )

Thursday 17 August 2017, by [BOFFEY Daniel](#), [BORGER Julian](#), [LEVIN Sam](#), [MacASKILL Ewen](#), [SCHWARZ Jon](#), [SMITH David](#), [WHITEHOUSE David](#) (Date first published: 17 August 2017).

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### A nuclear bully with Korea in his crosshairs

#### **David Whitehouse explains the backdrop to the latest escalation of military threats and counter-threats between the Trump administration and North Korea.**

DONALD TRUMP dramatically raised the danger of war last week by promising to respond to “any more threats” from North Korea by inflicting “fire and fury like the world has never seen.” The remark set off a chain of escalating rhetoric between Trump and the North Korean regime that stunned regional allies and rivals alike.

The talk of turning to military action was especially jarring because Trump had just registered a diplomatic success in cranking up pressure against the regime a few days before, when China agreed to tighten United Nations sanctions against the North.

Trump’s outburst came shortly after he received a Defense Intelligence report that the North “had cracked one of the final technological challenges in nuclear missile design by successfully producing a miniaturized warhead,” according to the *Financial Times* [1].

North Korean officials replied to Trump that they would prepare to create an “enveloping fire” of their own by splashing four test missiles into international waters around the island of Guam later in August [2]. One-third of Guam, a longtime island colony of the U.S. in the South Pacific, is home to an air base that houses nuclear-capable B-1B bombers.

Trump responded by doubling down against North Korea’s Kim Jong-un [3], saying, “If he does something in Guam, it will be an event the likes of which nobody has seen before, what will happen in North Korea.”

Administration insiders told the press that Trump’s “fire and fury” remark was improvised [4]. The aggressive policy, however, is not new. Three days before Trump spoke out, U.S. National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster explained Trump’s endorsement of “preventive war” in an interview with MSNBC [5]:

*“Well, what you’re asking is, are we preparing plans for a preventive war, right? A war that would prevent North Korea from threatening the United States with a nuclear weapon? And the president’s*

*been very clear about it. He said he's not going to tolerate North Korea being able to threaten the United States. Look at the nature of that regime. If they have nuclear weapons that can threaten the United States, it's intolerable from the president's perspective. So of course we have to provide all options to do that. And that includes a military option."*

**THE WEEK of incendiary** rhetoric—particularly the U.S. threat of military action—took U.S. regional allies South Korea and Japan by surprise. Both countries are likely targets of North Korean retaliatory strikes if the U.S. attacks, in part because both countries host U.S. military bases, including 32 on Japan's Okinawa island alone.

South Korean officials initially saw no way to step in while Trump and the North fought their war of words [6]. But on August 14, the South's new president, Moon Jae-in, gave a major address where he took a strong stand against unilateral U.S. action [7]:

*"Only the Republic of Korea [South Korea's official name] can make the decision for military action on the Korean Peninsula. Without the consent of the Republic of Korea, no country can determine to take military action. The Government will do all it can to prevent a war from breaking out."*

China, which is North Korea's largest trading partner and closest ally, also weighed in a few days earlier. The semi-official online magazine Global Times issued a warning to both parties on August 10 [8]:

*"China should also make clear that if North Korea launches missiles that threaten U.S. soil first and the U.S. retaliates, China will stay neutral. If the U.S. and South Korea carry out strikes and try to overthrow the North Korean regime and change the political pattern of the Korean Peninsula, China will prevent them from doing so."*

Although the statement may have been purposely vague, the words suggested that China might tolerate some proportionate U.S. military action in response to even a symbolic show of force against Guam. China was thus telling North Korea to back down on its latest threat.

But the more serious warning seemed to be targeted at Trump. Considering that any military confrontation could quickly escalate into a full-fledged war for control of the peninsula, China's statement declares that a U.S. attack could ignite a new Korean War—one that, like the war of 1950-53, would involve U.S. and Chinese troops in direct combat.

The statements from South Korea and China may calm the situation for a few days, but a new round of joint U.S.-South Korean war games is set to begin August 21 and last for 10 days. Tensions usually peak during these twice-annual military exercises, which involve an influx of U.S. soldiers and sailors to rehearse the overthrow of the Northern regime. The war games are one of the reasons that the regime has given for pursuing a nuclear deterrent.

**SOUTH KOREA'S capital** of Seoul is in the line of fire of about 10,000 North Korean artillery pieces and medium-range rockets. Tens of thousands of civilians, perhaps hundreds of thousands, could die in the first week of a real war [9].

The country's military is tightly coordinated with U.S. forces. In fact, the U.S. maintains operational command of joint actions in case of war [10]. Yet Trump did not consult the South about raising new threats against the North. One sign of the disconnect with the U.S. and the South is that neither president has yet appointed an ambassador to the other country.

Many Koreans—whether in the North, the South or the United States—were outraged to realize that Trump's vision of "America first" means that Korean lives are expendable.

"My biggest worry is that the U.S. would plot a pre-emptive attack on North Korea and carry it out without consulting our government," Kim Ho-joon, a 40-year-old South Korean office worker, told the *Korea Herald* [11]. "I think it may be a plausible option for the U.S., because the war would play out on the Korean Peninsula, not on their land."

That's exactly Trump's reasoning, according to Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C. [12]). He told Today Show interviewers on August 2 that Trump is willing to sacrifice Korean lives to prevent North Korea from acquiring a nuclear deterrent. According to the *Korea Times* report of the interview:

*Graham said that Trump won't allow the regime of Kim Jong-un to have an ICBM with a nuclear weapon capability to "hit America."*

"If there's going to be a war to stop [Kim Jong-un], it will be over there. If thousands die, they're going to die over there. They're not going to die here. And he has told me that to my face," Graham said.

"And that may be provocative, but not really. When you're president of the United States, where does your allegiance lie? To the people of the United States," the senator said.

Graham's exposé of Trump's thoughts provided an opening for Kim's regime to appeal to Korean nationalism, which is strong throughout the peninsula. The regime sponsored a rally that called "for achieving peace through the united efforts of the nation"—that is, without the U.S [13].

Even the fairly conservative Council of Korean Americans (CKA) raised a protest. The CKA president distributed an open protest letter to the group's members, who include prosperous second-generation immigrants to the U.S. [14]: "This kind of rhetoric is unacceptable to Korean Americans, who came from 'over there' and who have family, relatives, and a shared history with the people from 'over there.'"

**THE SOUTH'S Moon Jae-in** took office in May promising to pursue dialogue with the North, but his liberalism has not led him to take a pacifist tack. He initially campaigned in opposition to installing the U.S. anti-missile radar/rocket system known as THAAD, but his government indicated recently that it may accelerate the system's deployment in the South [15].

After the North's successful test of a long-range missile on July 4, Moon declared that the South needs to build medium-range missiles of its own. They would be able to reach North Korean targets, but like THAAD, a new set of South Korean missiles would also likely have enough range to reach—and to antagonize—China [16].

South Korea's subordination to the U.S. means that Moon needs to ask permission to upgrade the missile arsenal. The Pentagon last week gave its own green light to changing the U.S.-South Korean treaty to allow the South to build the new weapons [17].

When Moon laid claim to South Korea's right to decide on war and peace on August 15, the occasion was a major ceremonial address. North and South both celebrate Liberation Day on August 15, which marks the departure of Japanese troops in 1945 after 35 years as colonial overlords. It is thus a moment to assert Korean sovereignty.

If he really wanted to make a bold stroke for independence from U.S. belligerence, however, Moon could have announced that the South would refuse to participate in the 10-day Ulchi-Freedom Guardian war games that begin next week. Instead, Moon took pains to stress South Korea's political and military connection to the U.S.

He had already signaled his intent to stay in the orbit of U.S. militarism last week after he met with his own top military commanders [18]. Emphasizing the “urgent task of securing defense capabilities,” Moon said, “I believe we might need a complete defense reform at the level of a rebirth instead of making some improvements or modifications.”

Japan fell into line also. The chief cabinet minister endorsed Trump’s right to threaten military action against North Korea. On the day of Trump’s “fire and fury” tirade, a pair of Japanese jets joined U.S. B-1B strategic bombers in an exercise over the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, [19] which lies closest to the Korean peninsula.

Itsonori Onodera, the new defense minister, said that Japan has the right to shoot down North Korean missiles if they are headed for Guam. Japan’s armed forces are constitutionally restricted to self-defense, but a law enacted last year allows the Japanese military to act in “collective self-defense” of allies like the U.S [20]. The Japanese have accordingly positioned anti-missile batteries in western positions that North Korean missiles might fly over on their way to Guam [21].

Onodera has also claimed that Japan could invoke “pre-emptive self-defense” to attack North Korean ballistic missiles at their launch sites, but Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on August 6 that he has “no plan” to consider enabling that option [22]. “We are relying on the United States for [such] strike ability,” Abe said.

**IF NORTH Korea** is preparing for war, there isn’t much sign of it. Robert Carlin, a former State Department specialist on North Korea, told the *Financial Times* on August 11 that the North has made no real changes on the ground [23], such as putting citizens on high alert or pulling workers out of factories.

That same day, the 38North blog posted satellite photos of a naval shipyard suggesting that North Korea may be preparing a launch of a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) [24], last tested a year ago in a 300-mile flight. If that is the North’s plan for Guam, then missile-armed subs would need to get 1,800 miles closer to the island, which is 2,100 miles from North Korea.

Naval activity could be an instance of North Korean misdirection, but so could the whole threat to splash missiles near Guam. The *Financial Times* pointed out that KCNA’s report attributed the planning for the missile test to advisors [25], not to decision-makers such as Kim Jong-un, who would have to sign off on any plan.

As the South’s liberal *Hankyoreh* put it [26], this way of announcing the plan, due to be in Kim’s hands right about now, allows “splitting the threat level up into stages”—which, of course, makes it possible for him walk the threat backward or discard it with no real harm to his credibility.

On August 15, Kim did exactly that. The North’s official KCNA news outlet declared that Kim would wait and assess Trump’s “foolish and stupid conduct” before deciding about missile launches [27].

For anybody in the Trump administration who thinks that cranking up the level of crisis to the point of crisis will convince the North to disarm, the regime already answered last week [28]: “The strategic weapons that [North Korea] manufactured at the cost of blood and sweat, risking everything, are not a bargaining thing for getting acknowledgment from others.” Over the years, U.S. threats have merely reinforced the regime’s conviction that it needs a nuclear deterrent to ensure its survival [29].

The regime even rewrote the country’s constitution in 2012 to affirm that North Korea is committed to being a nuclear-armed state.

**FOR THE moment**, the Trump administration is tempering its threats of war. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary James Mattis published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* on August 13 [30] that called for negotiations with North Korea and declared that the U.S. “has no interest in regime change.”

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is on a tour of East Asia, with stops in Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul—where he assured Moon Jae-in that the U.S. regards military action against North Korea as a last resort [31].

There’s some question whether Trump was really prepared for an attack when he made his threats last week. Clearly, he hadn’t laid any groundwork with regional allies. What’s more, he scheduled the nation’s top military officer, Dunford, for his current talking tour right through the potential war zone [32], and troops were not moving into place for war.

Next week, though, things will be different. Extra U.S. troops will pour into South Korea for war games. If the past is any guide, both sides will re-intensify threats during these military exercises.

At times like these, there is a significant danger of war if either party miscalculates the other’s intent.

There is, however, a basic conflict that makes the momentary risks keep emerging. Decades of threats from the U.S. have made the North Korean regime determined to build a nuclear deterrent to ensure its survival, while the U.S. has committed to use any means, including war, to prevent the North from acquiring that deterrent.

Trump’s notoriously impulsive personality may make a war more likely, but it’s not what drives him into conflict. The conflict is a matter of U.S. policy.

It’s a policy, in fact, that he inherited from two previous presidents. Beginning with George W. Bush, U.S. presidents have proclaimed that any effective deterrent against U.S. military action would be treated as a threat to the U.S. Barack Obama affirmed the same stance in 2012 [33]. What’s more, Obama told Trump that North Korea’s weapons programs would be the most urgent problem he would face when he came into office [34].

Trump makes things more dangerous, but the bipartisan drive for imperial dominance is why the U.S. keeps steering a collision course with North Korea.

## **David Whitehouse**

\* Socialist Worker. August 17, 2017:

<https://socialistworker.org/2017/08/17/a-nuclear-bully-with-korea-in-his-crosshairs>

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## **Trump on North Korea: maybe ‘fire and fury’ wasn’t tough enough threat**

**President warns country to ‘get their act together’, as adviser Sebastian Gorka rejects Rex Tillerson’s attempt at reassurance.**

Donald Trump has issued another provocative warning to North Korea, suggesting that his threat to

unleash “fire and fury” on the country was not “tough enough”.

The US president told reporters that North Korea “better get their act together or they’re going to be in trouble like few nations ever have been in trouble in this world”.

Trump was speaking ahead of a national security briefing at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, where he is on what he describes as a working vacation. The president’s threat earlier this week to unleash “fire and fury like the world has never seen” was widely condemned as unnecessarily incendiary.

But far from toning down the rhetoric, Trump said on Thursday: “Maybe it wasn’t tough enough. They’ve been doing this to our country for a long time, for many years, and it’s about time that somebody stuck up for the people of this country and for the people of other countries. So if anything, maybe that statement wasn’t tough enough.”

Asked if the US is considering a preemptive strike, the president replied: “We don’t talk about that. I never do.”

Trump went on to say that North Korea should be “very nervous” if it is even thinking about launching an attack on the US or its allies. “Because things will happen to them like they never thought possible, OK? He’s been pushing the world around for a long time.”

He also suggested that he would take a more lenient view of China’s trade policies if it brings pressure to bear on Pyongyang.

The latest remarks came after North Korea derided Trump’s “fire and fury” warning as a “load of nonsense” and announced a detailed plan to launch missiles aimed at the waters off the coast of the US Pacific territory of Guam.

A statement attributed to Gen Kim Rak-gyom, the head of the country’s strategic forces, declared: “Sound dialogue is not possible with such a guy bereft of reason and only absolute force can work on him.”

The general outlined a plan to carry out a demonstration launch of four intermediate-range missiles that would fly over Japan and then land in the sea around Guam, “enveloping” the island.

“The Hwasong-12 rockets to be launched by the KPA [Korean People’s Army] will cross the sky above Shimane, Hiroshima and Koichi prefectures of Japan,” the statement said. “They will fly for 3,356.7km for 1,065 seconds and hit the waters 30 to 40km away from Guam.”

The statement said the plan for this show of force would be ready by the middle of this month and then await orders from the commander-in-chief, Kim Jong-un.

The US has a naval base in Guam and the island is home to Andersen air base, which has six B-1B heavy bombers. According to NBC News, the non-nuclear bombers have made 11 practice sorties since May in readiness for a potential strike on North Korea. The remote island is home to 162,000 people.

The White House insists that Trump’s thinking has not changed since his dire threat. Lindsey Graham, a senator known to speak with him regularly, told the radio host Hugh Hewitt: “If negotiations fail, he is willing to abandon ‘strategic patience’ and use pre-emption. I think he’s there mentally. He has told me this.

“So I’m 100% confident that if President Trump had to use military force to deny the North Koreans the capability to strike America with a nuclear-tipped missile, he would do that.”

Social media in the US continues to buzz with anxious predictions, dark humour and maps of what a nuclear blast area might look like in New York. The White House has done little to quell public fears. Sebastian Gorka, a national security adviser, told Fox News that the standoff was “analogous to the Cuban missile crisis”, which almost brought the US and Soviet Union to nuclear war in 1962.

But analysts cautioned against exaggerating to the point of panic or overstating the danger posed by North Korea, which has been trading threats with the US for years.

Anthony Cordesman, a former consultant to the defense and state departments, now based at the Center for Strategic & International Studies thinktank in Washington, said: “People are looking at the risk now as much more immediate than it is. The North Korean tests now would not be able to establish reliability or accuracy.

“Historically you’re talking months or several years until you have the missile. Then you have to be convinced you have a nuclear weapon that would survive. Simply being shown a picture of something like a large basketball is not evidence of reliability.”

The analyst added: “Even the ability to hit a city-sized target with any predictability can take significant time even after you get the components. This is not to say any of it won’t happen, but to say it’s going to happen now is ridiculous. It’s like being in the Cuban missile crisis without any missiles and without any nuclear weapons.”

According to Cordesman, widely reported projections of the death toll in South Korea are also hyped because they are based on the notion that its citizens would stay and wait to be targets of day after day of bombardment, while both the South Korean and the US military did nothing. “The estimates of North Korean artillery casualties in Seoul are absurd but everyone is quoting them without asking where they come from. That’s typical. It’s one thing to have a worst-case analysis; it’s another thing to not say it’s the worst-case analysis.”

South Korea’s military said on Thursday that North Korea’s statements were a challenge to Seoul and the US-South Korea alliance. Joint chiefs of staff spokesman Roh Jae-cheon told a media briefing that South Korea was prepared to act immediately against any North Korean provocation.

Japan’s chief government spokesman said the country could “never tolerate this”. “North Korea’s actions are obviously provocative to the region as well as to the security of the international community,” Yoshihide Suga said.

The announcement on the North Korean state news service KCNA came at the end of two days of brinksmanship which began with the leak of a US intelligence report that Pyongyang had developed a nuclear warhead small enough to put on a missile. This was followed by Trump’s warning of “fire and fury”.

On Thursday, the US secretary of defense James Mattis, who was traveling in California, took questions from reporters about the president’s ramping up of rhetoric over North Korea. Thinking in silence for a number of seconds before answering, he said: “You can see the American effort is diplomatically led. It has diplomatic traction, it is gaining diplomatic results.”

“And I want to stay right there right now,” he added. “The tragedy of war is well enough known. It doesn’t need another characterisation beyond the fact that it would be catastrophic.”



However Gorka, the White House adviser, declined to tone down the harsh language, warning Pyongyang: "Do not challenge the United States because you will pay a cost if you do so."

Asked if the threat of a strike, rather than an actual attack, would be enough to provoke a response, Gorka told the BBC: "If you threaten a nation, then what should you expect: a stiffly worded letter to be sent by courier? Is that what the UK would do if a nation threatened a nuclear-tipped missile launched against any of the UK's territories?"

He also slapped down the secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, who had tried to be reassuring, saying: "Americans should sleep well at night."

"You should listen to the president; the idea that Secretary Tillerson is going to discuss military matters is simply nonsensical," Gorka told the BBC.

State department spokesperson Heather Nauert fired back at the criticism of her boss. "He's a cabinet secretary," she told reporters. "He's the fourth in line to the presidency. He carries a big stick."

She added: "I think that everyone has clearly heard what Secretary Tillerson's forceful comments have been and continue to be."

In the event of a missile launch by North Korea, the US military faces the dilemma of trying to intercept the incoming missiles and risking humiliation if it fails. Trump would have to decide whether to try to carry out a pre-emptive strike on the Hwasong launchpads or a retaliation strike if the launch went ahead. The North Korean military has frequently tested missiles that land in the sea off the Japanese coast, without a military response from Tokyo.

Despite the harsh rhetoric, there was no change in US military deployments or alert status.

The EU on Thursday expanded its sanctions regime to include nine new people and four organisations, including the state-owned Foreign Trade Bank, in response to North Korea's continued nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development.

Those listed will be subject to EU asset freezes and travel restrictions, bringing Brussels in line with a UN resolution adopted last week. Earlier this week, the European commission said Pyongyang was in "outright violation" of international commitments, but a spokesman said the EU "excludes" any military solution.

**Julian Borger and David Smith** in Washington and **Daniel Boffey** in Brussels

\* The Guardian. Friday 11 August 2017 08.23 BST First published on Thursday 10 August 2017 19.37 BST

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/10/trump-north-korea-threat-james-mattis-fox-news>

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## **Are US defences strong enough to ward off North Korean missiles?**

**Despite Pentagon claims that its systems would easily see off an attack, interceptor test results are less than comforting.**



The heated rhetoric between the Trump administration and North Korea is focusing attention on missile technology and, just as importantly for the residents of South Korea, Japan and the US, anti-missile defences.

### **What kind of anti-missile defences does the US possess?**

The US has various anti-missile options in its arsenal, some designed to take down missiles at short-range and others for medium-to-long-range.

The US relies heavily on the US Patriot missile, also used by Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence (THAAD). The US deployed THAAD to South Korea this year to defend against medium-range missiles.

There is a three-phased defence system: ground-based missiles in place on the Korean peninsula; US naval ships stationed in the Pacific armed with anti-missile weaponry; and, as the line of last resort, two bases in Alaska and California that can launch an estimated 36 interceptors.

### **Is the US system robust enough to stop a North Korean missile attack?**

No air defence system has been established that offers anything like a complete guarantee of success.

The Pentagon – and the manufacturers of missile defence systems – offer repeated assurances that air defence systems would be more than a match for any North Korean attack. But when missile defence systems have been put to the test over the last few decades, the performance has been far from reassuring.

The US provided anti-missile defence systems to Israel and Saudi Arabia during the First Gulf War as protection against Scud missiles fired by Saddam Hussein's Iraqi troops.

The US system appeared to have clear superiority and it was initially claimed that it had shot down 41 of 42 missiles fired by Iraq. But the claim was later scaled back and eventually it was acknowledged that only a few missiles had been hit.

Recent tests of interceptors have provided little comfort – with success rates of around 50% on average.

The Pentagon celebrated in May when it destroyed a mock warhead over the Pacific. US vice-admiral Jim Syring, director of the Pentagon agency responsible for missile defence, described it as an “incredible achievement”.

But overall the performance has been spotty. Since the newest intercept system was introduced in 2004 and deemed to be combat ready, only four of nine intercept attempts have been successful. It is not a matter of malfunctions in the early days. Of the five tests since 2010, only two have been successful.

### **If the US hit a nuclear-tipped missile would there be a nuclear explosion?**

Almost certainly not. The offensive missile would disintegrate on impact with the interceptor missile. A complicated sequence of events needs to take place to detonate a nuclear warhead.

### **Should we be worried?**

Writing in 2015, Steven Pifer, an arms control expert at Washington's Brookings Institution, asked a US official what would happen if a North Korean missile was launched in the direction of Seattle. The official said he would fire a bunch of interceptors and cross his fingers.

**Ewen MacAskill**

\* The Guardian. Thursday 10 August 2017 15.26 BST Last modified on Friday 11 August 2017 09.49 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/10/are-us-defences-strong-enough-to-ward-off-north-korean-missiles>

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## **Steve Bannon brands far right 'losers' and contradicts Trump in surprise interview**

**White House figure tells the American Prospect magazine there is no military solution to North Korea and warns of a China trade war.**

White House chief strategist Steve Bannon has given an unusual interview in which he claimed there was no military solution for North Korea, the far right was a "collection of clowns" and the left's focus on racism would allow him to "crush the Democrats".

Bannon, who has been called the mastermind behind Donald Trump's nationalist agenda, made the controversial and unsolicited remarks to Robert Kuttner, co-founder and co-editor of the American Prospect, a leftwing political magazine, in an interview published Wednesday [35].

The seemingly candid comments - which included the claims that he would oust his rivals in the federal government, who were "wetting themselves" - come at a time when Bannon faces an uncertain future at the White House [36]. There have been increasing calls from the left and the right for the removal of the former editor of Breitbart News. When Trump was asked at a press conference this week if the chief strategist would remain in his position, the president said: "We'll see."

It is unclear why Bannon chose to call Kuttner, who wrote that he had not requested the interview and was "stunned" to hear from him. However after publication stories circulated that Bannon was unaware he was providing an interview.

There have been recent reports of internal conflicts and power struggles within the administration, and Bannon made the call amid an intense backlash related to Trump's links to the far right [37] and the president's comments that there were "very fine people" at a violent white nationalist protest in Charlottesville.

In the American Prospect story, headlined "Steve Bannon, unrepentant", Trump's top aide said: "We're at economic war with China. It's in all their literature. They're not shy about saying what they're doing. One of us is going to be a hegemon in 25 or 30 years and it's gonna be them if we go down this path. On Korea, they're just tapping us along. It's just a sideshow."

Contradicting Trump's threats of "fire and fury" on North Korea, Bannon said: "There's no military

solution [to North Korea's nuclear threats], forget it. Until somebody solves the part of the equation that shows me that 10 million people in Seoul don't die in the first 30 minutes from conventional weapons, I don't know what you're talking about, there's no military solution here, they got us."

Bannon also discussed his "battle inside the administration to take a harder line on China trade", Kuttner wrote. Asked about his adversaries at the US departments of state and defense, Bannon responded, "Oh, they're wetting themselves."

He continued: "I'm changing out people at east Asian defense; I'm getting hawks in. I'm getting Susan Thornton [acting head of east Asian and Pacific affairs] out at state."

The State Department and the White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Wednesday night. At the time of writing Susan Thornton was still listed in her position.

Kuttner also asked Bannon about the "ugly white nationalism epitomized by the racist violence in Charlottesville and Trump's reluctance to condemn it". Heather Heyer, a civil rights activist, was killed when a man alleged to be a white nationalist drove a car into a crowd of counter protesters on Saturday.

Bannon dismissed the far right as "irrelevant", Kuttner wrote, quoting the Trump aide as saying: "Ethno-nationalism - it's losers. It's a fringe element. I think the media plays it up too much, and we gotta help crush it, you know, uh, help crush it more ... These guys are a collection of clowns."

Regarding the Democrats, Bannon said: "The longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats."

Kuttner wrote that he had never spoken to Bannon before and that the question of whether the call was on or off the record never came up.

Anthony Scaramucci, Trump's short-lived communications director, was recently fired after he called up a reporter and launched a foul-mouthed rant against senior colleagues, including Bannon.

Bannon has attracted significant controversy during his time at the White House, where he was blamed for the failed implementation of the travel ban, which was quickly blocked by the courts.

It has been reported that the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his wife, Ivanka Trump, have long urged Bannon's dismissal.

The president tried to downplay Bannon's influence on his campaign at the recent press conference, saying, "I like Mr Bannon. He's a friend of mine. But Mr Bannon came on very late."

**Sam Levin** in San Francisco

\* The Guardian. Thursday 17 August 2017 03.14 BST Last modified on Thursday 17 August 2017 04.50 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/17/steve-bannon-calls-far-right-losers-trump-warns-china-trade-war-american-prospect>

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## **We can stop North Korea from attacking us. All we have to do is not attack them**

NORTH KOREA IS not going to launch a first strike on America or its allies with nuclear weapons.

To understand this, you don't need to know anything about the history of U.S.-North Korea relations, or the throw weight of intercontinental ballistic missiles, or even where North Korea is. All you need to know is human history. And history says that small, poor, weak countries tend not to start wars with gigantic, wealthy, powerful countries — especially when doing so will obviously result in their obliteration.

So what exactly is the “crisis” involving North Korea?

The answer is simple: We're not worried that we can't deter North Korea. We're worried because a North Korea that can plausibly strike the U.S. with nuclear weapons will likely be able to deter us from doing whatever we want. For example, we might not be able to invade North Korea.

When they go on TV, U.S. officials pretend there's some chance that North Korea's dictator Kim Jong-un will wake up one day and persuade all the people who help him run their bleak kakistocracy that they should commit mass suicide. But backstage, in government memos and think tank reports, America's foreign policy mandarins have explained the issue clearly, over and over again.

One lucid example can be found in “Rebuilding America's Defenses,” a well-known paper by the Project for a New American Century. The U.S., it explained, “must counteract the effects of the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction that may soon allow lesser states to deter U.S. military action. ... In the post-Cold War era, America and its allies, rather than the Soviet Union, have become the primary objects of deterrence and it is states like Iraq, Iran and North Korea who most wish to develop deterrent capabilities.”

And we're not just talk: Iraq and Libya both surrendered their unconventional military capacity, and we then invaded them. North Korea's rulers definitely noticed that and have clearly explained why they have no intention of following Saddam Hussein and Moammar Gadhafi into oblivion.

So take a look at these basic facts about the U.S. and North Korea, and ask yourself: Who exactly is plausibly going to attack whom?

None of this means, of course, that North Korea having nuclear weapons and long-range missiles is a good thing. It's terrible. The Cold War was full of examples of nuclear war almost breaking out by accident at moments of high tension. But there's nothing we can do to avoid that with North Korea except by talking to them and trying to reduce conflict whenever possible.

It's also unsettling to imagine the fate of North Korea's weapons when the regime finally dissolves. Moreover, it's not impossible that people in North Korea's chain of command would find it tempting to sell one of their warheads to terrorists. But that ship has sailed; any attempt to reduce the risk of those things to zero would have certain consequences far worse than the risk itself.

So let's concentrate on the good news: We definitely have it in our power to prevent North Korea from using its nuclear weapons on us. All we have to do is not attack them first.

**Jon Schwarz**

\* The Intercept. August 14 2017, 6:18 p.m:

<https://theintercept.com/2017/08/14/we-can-stop-north-korea-from-attacking-us-all-we-have-to-do-is-not-attack-them/>

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## Footnotes

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