

Articles on the US-North Korea crisis (VIII) - On the verge of nuclear war? The US-Russia-Iran context

Sunday 3 December 2017, by [BORGER Julian](#), [CARDEN James](#), [COLLINS Pádraig](#), [LIMA Cristiano](#) (Date first published: 3 December 2017).

Yet more calls for sanctions and isolation following the latest ballistic missile test by North Korea. Perry warned that the nuclear risk has not abated since the end of the first Cold War—indeed, the risk has only grown

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“What to do with the world on the nuclear brink, with the very real potential for an outbreak of perhaps simultaneous crises between the United States, Russia, Iran and North Korea?”

“Perry recalled that, during the first Cold War, both the United States and the USSR experienced multiple nuclear false alarms that could have resulted in planetary catastrophe.”

Former Defense Secretary William Perry Sounds the Alarm Over the Present Nuclear Danger

What will the consequences be if the bipartisan consensus on Russia continues to be almost completely untethered from reality?

On a brisk Tuesday night in Washington, DC’s tony Cleveland Park neighborhood, hundreds of concerned citizens gathered at Washington National Cathedral to hear some unpleasant truths from former defense secretary William Perry [1].

Perry was there as part of the cathedral’s Nancy and Paul Ignatius Program to address what he believes is the very real danger of an accidental nuclear conflagration between the United States and Russia, now that relations between the two nuclear superpowers have deteriorated to their lowest point in the quarter-century since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Perry recalled his own experiences during the first Cold War, when, as a young man, he served in

the Army during the occupation of postwar Japan, and later, when he served as undersecretary of defense for research and engineering under President Jimmy Carter, and, later still, from 1994–97, when he served as Pentagon chief under President Clinton.

California Governor Jerry Brown has written, “I know of no person who understands the science and politics of modern weaponry better than William J. Perry [2].”

Perry recalled that, during the first Cold War, both the United States and the USSR experienced multiple nuclear false alarms that could have resulted in planetary catastrophe.

Perry recounted one such incident that he experienced firsthand, when, in November 1979 [3], during his time as undersecretary, he was awakened by a 3 am phone call from a watch officer at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The watch officer informed Perry that 200 intercontinental ballistic missiles had been launched at the United States by the Soviet Union.

It was quickly determined that this was a false alarm—but Perry noted that, because relations between the United States and the USSR were relatively stable at that time, there was reason to question whether the information from NORAD was correct.

But what if, asked Perry, such a false alarm had occurred during a time of heightened tension, as during the Cuba or Berlin crises, or even today?

Perry warned that the nuclear risk has not abated since the end of the first Cold War—indeed, the risk has only grown. Said Perry, “The likelihood today of a nuclear catastrophe is greater than during the Cold War.”

“Today, inexplicably to me, we are recreating the geopolitical hostility of the Cold War and we are rebuilding the nuclear dangers of the Cold War. We are doing this without any serious public discussion, or any real understanding of the consequences of these actions: we are sleepwalking into a new Cold War, and there is a very real danger we will blunder into a nuclear war.”

Following Perry’s address, Susan Eisenhower, a respected arms-control and Russian-affairs expert, appeared alongside former secretary of state John Kerry, former national security adviser Stephen Hadley, and Washington Post columnist David Ignatius for a discussion about a number of potential nuclear flash-points.

Eisenhower observed that today relations between the United States and Russia are so bad that it would be hard to imagine that an American president could extend an invitation to a Russian president to visit the United States—as when her grandfather invited Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to visit in 1959.

Eisenhower agreed with Perry that the situation that exists between the United States and Russia today is fraught with danger, which is why, she said, “I don’t understand why we are cutting off all the vital exchanges that keep US-Russian relations from dropping below an acceptable level.”

“Today we have no exchanges of any kind, we are punishing Russia, [and] we are punishing ourselves.... it would be catastrophic if we turn the Russian people against us.”

Yet the question remains: What will the consequences be if the warnings of Perry and Eisenhower continue to fall on deaf ears and the bipartisan consensus on Russia continues to be almost completely untethered from reality?

It hardly should need pointing out that the new Cold War is unfolding against the backdrop of a

renewed assault on the P5+1 Iranian nuclear agreement. The assault, led by the Trump administration and abetted by the congressional war party, is taking place in spite of the fact that in mid-November the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed, for the ninth straight time, that the Islamic Republic of Iran is in compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [4].

According to a recent report [5]:

The confidential quarterly IAEA report, seen by several Western news agencies on November 12, said Iran “has not enriched” uranium above low levels and that its stockpile of enriched uranium was under the agreed limit of 300 kilograms.

The IAEA also said its inspectors faced no difficulties in accessing sites that they wanted to visit.

On Tuesday at the National Cathedral, John Kerry, a principal architect of the Iranian nuclear agreement, pushed back on the newly empowered critics of the agreement.

In the absence of a deal, “and without exaggeration,” said Kerry, “the likelihood is very high that we would have been in a conflict” with Iran.

“Iran was a threshold nuclear nation when we sat down to talk for the first time in 35 years,” said Kerry. But under the agreement, Iran went from 12,000kg of enriched uranium to 300kg. That, said Kerry, is the stockpile Iran has today and will have for the next 15 years, thanks to the agreement.

Still more, the Iranians agreed to keep the level of enrichment at 3.67 percent (down from 20 percent, which was the level of enrichment Iran had reached prior to the deal) for the next 15 years. Kerry noted that the international community is now able to trace “every ounce of uranium they produce in their mines for the next 25 years.”

“It is physically impossible to make a nuclear weapon,” said Kerry, “with 300kg at 3.67 percent enrichment.”

Kerry observed that, while many in Congress and in the administration are agitating to implement ever-greater sanctions on Iran (in order, of course, to destroy the deal), few are aware that we have fewer sanctions in place against North Korea, which has roughly 20 nuclear weapons, than we have in place against Iran, which has none.

And so: What to do with the world on the nuclear brink, with the very real potential for an outbreak of perhaps simultaneous crises between the United States, Russia, Iran and North Korea?

As Perry pointed out, climate change is another looming catastrophe, but it is one of which the public is, for the most part, aware. Perry argued that, as is the case with climate change, “we need a program of public education” regarding the growing nuclear danger.

And for his part, Perry pledged to dedicate the remainder of his public career to the task.

In his recent book, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, Perry writes: “Our chief peril is that the poised nuclear doom, much of it hidden beneath the seas and in remote badlands, is too far out of the global public consciousness. Passivity shows broadly.”

Finding, he said, his motivation in a wish that his grandchildren not have to live with the ever-present specter of nuclear catastrophe hanging like a Sword of Damocles above their heads, Perry has proved to be anything but a passive player in this continuing, and very troubling, drama.

James Carden

* The Nation:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/former-defense-secretary-william-perry-sounds-the-alarm-over-the-present-nuclear-danger/>

* James W. Carden is a contributing writer at The Nation and the executive editor for the American Committee for East-West Accord.

Risk of war with North Korea grows each day, says Trump's security adviser

HR McMaster tells defence forum that Kim Jong-un's regime is the 'greatest immediate threat to US'.

The potential of a US war with North Korea is growing each day, Donald Trump's national security adviser said on Saturday.

Speaking at the Reagan National Defense Forum in Simi Valley, California, HR McMaster said North Korea is "the greatest immediate threat to the United States".

"I think it's increasing every day, which means that we are in a race, really, we are in a race to be able to solve this problem," he said.

Asked about North Korea's latest ballistic missile test this week, McMaster said US president Donald Trump is committed to the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

McMaster said China could impose more stringent economic sanctions against North Korea, saying it has "tremendous coercive economic power" over Pyongyang.

"There are ways to address this problem short of armed conflict, but it is a race because [Kim Jong-un's] getting closer and closer, and there's not much time left," CNN reports McMaster said.

"We're asking China not to do us or anybody else a favour," he said. "We're asking China to act in China's interest, as they should, and we believe increasingly that it's in China's urgent interest to do more."

McMaster said China should cut off North Korean oil imports: "You can't shoot a missile without fuel." He added that both he and Trump felt a 100% oil embargo would "be appropriate at this point".

He said Kim was unlikely to scale back on his missile program "without some significant new actions in the form of much more severe sanctions" and "complete enforcement of the sanctions that are in place".

The agency tasked with protecting the US from missile attacks is scouting the west coast for places to deploy new anti-missile defences, two congressmen said, as North Korea's missile tests raise concerns about how the country would defend itself from an attack.

West coast defences would probably include Terminal High Altitude Area Defence anti-ballistic missiles, similar to those deployed in South Korea to protect against a potential North Korean attack.

Congressman Mike Rogers, who sits on the house armed services committee and chairs the strategic forces subcommittee which oversees missile defence, said the Missile Defense Agency (MDA), was aiming to install extra defences at west coast sites.

"It's just a matter of the location, and the MDA making a recommendation as to which site meets their criteria for location, but also the environmental impact," the Alabama congressman and Republican said during an interview on the sidelines of the Reagan National Defense Forum.

In North Korea, Kim thanked workers during a visit to the factory that built the tires for a huge vehicle used to transport the new intercontinental ballistic missile test-launched on Tuesday.

The launch of the Hwasong-15 ICBM in violation of international sanctions was celebrated on Friday with a huge public rally and fireworks in Pyongyang.

At the factory, Kim complimented workers for manufacturing the tires for the nine-axle missile truck without relying on imported equipment. He also called for efforts to raise production to "satisfy the daily-increasing needs in developing the country's economy and beefing up national defence capabilities," the North's official news agency reported.

Kim in September tasked the Amnokgang tire factory to make the tires for the "great event in November," it said.

South Korea's military believes the latest missile, which flew 950km (600 miles) before splashing down in waters near Japan, is potentially capable of striking targets as far as 13,000km, which would put Washington within reach.

Pádraig Collins and agencies

Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report

* *The Guardian*. Sunday 3 December 2017 11.11 GMT First published on Sunday 3 December 2017 04.09 GMT:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/03/risk-of-war-with-north-korea-grows-every-day-says-trumps-security-adviser>

North Korea: Trump threatens 'major sanctions' after latest missile test

The president said he had spoken with China's leader Xi Jinping, and 'this situation will be handled' after North Korea fired a powerful, ballistic missile.

Donald Trump threatened to impose major sanctions on North Korea in response to Pyongyang's latest test of a ballistic missile, that appeared capable of reaching most if not all of the US mainland.

The US president's remarks were followed by UN ambassador Nikki Haley saying the ballistic

missile launch “brings us closer to war” at an emergency UN security council meeting, which would end the North Korean regime.

Trump said in a tweet he had spoken with the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, about “the provocative actions of North Korea”, and promised: “Additional major sanctions will be imposed on North Korea today. This situation will be handled!”

In remarks later on Wednesday at a public event in Missouri, Trump departed from a speech about tax cuts to aim a barb at the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, who he has previously referred to as “Little Rocket Man”. “Little Rocket Man, he is a sick puppy,” the president said.

Later Wednesday, at the UN, Haley said if war comes as a result of further acts of “aggression” like the latest launch “make no mistake the North Korean regime will be utterly destroyed”.

Haley says the Trump administration warned North Korea that its future is in the hands of its leaders and the choice was theirs. With Tuesday’s launch, she said, Kim’s regime made a choice “and with this choice comes a critical choice for the rest of the world”.

She called on all countries to cut all ties to North Korea.

The security council was meeting in New York to discuss possible new measures, and the US secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, made clear that the US would press for tougher measures allowing North Korean shipping to be stopped and searched on the high seas.

A White House statement about the phone conversation said Trump made clear “the determination of the United States to defend ourselves and our allies”.

Trump also apparently “emphasized the need for China to use all available levers to convince North Korea to end its provocations and return to the path of denuclearization”.

After two and a half months of relative quiet, North Korea said it successfully fired a “significantly more” powerful, nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile early Wednesday. Outside governments and analysts concurred it had marked a jump in capability.

The ICBM launched early on Wednesday morning was described as the Hwasong-15, with the capability to carry a nuclear warhead and with “significantly more” power than missiles it’s tested earlier. The missile rose more than 4,000km into space in an almost vertical trajectory and splashed down off the west coast of Japan about 1,000km from where it was fired, reportedly from a mobile launcher. Independent analysts said that with a more normal, flatter trajectory the missile could travel up to 13,000km, putting all of the US mainland in range, though it was unclear how much that reach would be reduced if the missile was carrying a nuclear warhead.

Most observers doubted that another set of UN sanctions would stop the North Korean missile and nuclear programmes, but predicted that once the regime felt it had perfected its weapons, it might be ready to talk.

“This confirms that North Korea is hell-bent on advancing their nuclear and missile programmes they believe are essential to their survival,” said Mintaro Oba, a former state department official. “It looks like they advanced their technology with this launch but there are still questions about re-entry capability for example.”

“Even if there are major new sanctions, it will only increase the North Koreans’ resolve to show they are not affected. They will continue to test and increase their capabilities. They want to get to the

point of us accepting they have this nuclear weapons programme,” Oba said. “It’s a poker game that North Korea seems to be winning.”

China’s foreign ministry said Beijing was “seriously concerned about and opposed to” North Korea’s latest missile test.

Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said on Wednesday that China “strongly urges” the North to abide by security council resolutions and cease actions that might escalate tensions.

Geng told reporters at a daily news briefing that all concerned parties should “act with caution and jointly safeguard regional peace and stability”.

China is North Korea’s only significant ally and biggest source of trade and aid, but has backed increasingly harsh UN security council resolutions in hopes of convincing Pyongyang to return to talks.

It has called on the North to cease its missile tests and nuclear activities in return for the US and South Korea suspending large-scale military exercises.

However, Beijing has rejected measures that could destabilize Kim’s regime and says military force is cannot be an option in dealing with the tensions.

South Korea’s president, Moon Jae-in, spoke to Japan’s prime minister, Shinzō Abe, about North Korea’s test and pledged joint efforts to strengthen sanctions and pressure on Pyongyang over its nuclear ambitions.

Moon’s office said the leaders agreed during the phone conversation on Wednesday that the threat posed by North Korea’s expanding nuclear programme should no longer be tolerated and vowed to push for stronger measures against the North at an upcoming UN security council meeting.

North Korea’s state media say Kim ordered his engineers to launch a new intercontinental ballistic missile with “courage” a day ahead of the flight test where it demonstrated its reach deep into the US mainland.

State television on Wednesday broadcast a photo of Kim’s signed order, where he wrote: “Test launch is approved. Taking place at the daybreak of Nov 29! Fire with courage for the party and country!”

The North says Kim gave the order for the launch on Tuesday.

Julian Borger in Washington and agencies

* The Guardian. Wednesday 29 November 2017 23.25 GMT First published on Wednesday 29 November 2017 16.22 GMT:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/29/north-korea-trump-threatens-major-sanctions-after-latest-missile-test>

U.S. calls for global shutdown of all ties to North Korea

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, called for a complete shutdown of all ties with North Korea by every nation on Wednesday, the strongest response yet from the Trump administration after the country's latest missile test.

"Today we call on all nations to cut off all ties with North Korea," Haley said during an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council. The Trump administration called for the session after the Pentagon announced that Pyongyang had conducted its first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile in over two months.

Haley further called for all countries to "sever diplomatic relations with North Korea and limit military, scientific technical and commercial cooperation." The ambassador, who has repeatedly called for U.N. allies to take a tougher stance against the government of Kim Jong Un, said all nations should also seize all imports and exports with the country and expel North Korean workers.

The measures, if fully implemented, would completely isolate the Kim government, which has grown increasingly ostracized by the international community amid its continuing weapons tests in pursuit of developing a fully realized nuclear arsenal.

During her Security Council address, Haley issued a dire warning to North Korea that should its actions draw the U.S. into war, it would be "utterly destroyed."

"We have never sought war with North Korea, and still today we do not seek it," she said. "If war comes, make no mistake, the North Korean regime will be utterly destroyed."

President Donald Trump vowed earlier Wednesday that his administration would impose "additional major sanctions."

The president later derided Kim during a speech in Missouri, calling him "Lil' Rocket Man" and "a sick puppy."

In August, Trump threatened to bring "fire and fury" down on North Korea should it carry on with weapons testing.

CRISTIANO LIMA

* Politico. 11/29/2017 07:11 PM EST:

<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/11/29/nikki-haley-north-korea-shutdown-270489>

Russia rejects US call to cut ties with North Korea

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has rejected the US call to cut ties with North Korea after Pyongyang launched ballistic missiles on Wednesday.

"We perceived this negatively," Lavrov told journalists in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, commenting on Washington's statement on the need to cut ties with North Korea.

US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, on Wednesday called on all countries to sever relations with Pyongyang, including cutting trade links and expelling North Korean workers.

The Trump administration vowed to slap additional sanctions on North Korea after the reclusive country test-launched its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) yet, with a range capable of striking Washington, DC.

North Korean state television, KCNA, said that missile is the “most powerful ICBM, which meets the goal of the completion of the rocket weaponry system development set by the DPRK”, according to South Korea’s news agency, Yonhap. DPRK refers to North Korea’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Last month President Donald Trump said that Russia was hurting US efforts to disarm the North Korea of its nuclear weapons.

Trump has praised China - a close ally of Pyongyang - for its efforts to put pressure on North Korea.

In a tit-for-tat war of words with Korean leader Kim Jong-un, the US president called Kim a “madman” while the Korea leader dubbed him a “mentally deranged US dotard”.

The Russian foreign minister in September urged “hot heads” to calm down, calling the war of words “a kindergarten fight”.

* Al Jazeera. 30 Nov 2017:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/russia-rejects-call-cut-ties-north-korea-171130104441729.html>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhsRhfhNw4>

[2] <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/07/14/a-stark-nuclear-warning/>

[3] <http://blog.ucsusa.org/david-wright/nuclear-false-alarm-950>

[4] <https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/>

[5] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-un-nuclear-watchdog-report-in-compliance/28851687.html>