

New US-North Korea tensions

Friday 7 July 2017, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#), [McCARTHY Tom](#), [SIDDIQUI Sabrina](#), [WINTOUR Patrick](#) (Date first published: 6 July 2017).

Contents

- [‘Very severe’ response](#)
- [How the US could respond \(...\)](#)

‘Very severe’ response

Trump says US mulling ‘very severe’ response to North Korea missile test

US president says he is determined to confront threat from Pyongyang, after his ambassador to UN raises prospect of military action if diplomacy fails.

Donald Trump has said he is considering some “very severe things” in response to North Korea’s successful test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) this week, as he called on other nations to exert pressure on Pyongyang over its “very bad behaviour”.

Trump said the US would confront the North Korean threat, but noted that he would not draw a red line. “I don’t like to talk about what I have planned, but I have some pretty severe things that we’re thinking about,” he said. “That doesn’t mean we’re going to do them.”

The president’s comments, made in Poland, came after the US ambassador to the UN made a push for new sanctions at a security council meeting and said America’s “considerable military forces” could be used against North Korea.

Nikki Haley told the meeting the US would submit a draft resolution within days “that raises the international response in a way that is proportionate to North Korea’s escalation”, but warned Washington had options if diplomacy failed.

“The United States is prepared to use the full range of our capabilities to defend ourselves and our allies,” Haley told the United Nations security council on Wednesday. “One of our capabilities lies with our considerable military forces. We will use them, if we must, but we prefer not to have to go in that direction.”

She said the US was eyeing penalties against “any country that does business with this outlaw regime”.

On Thursday Russia blocked a security council statement condemning the launch, because it disputed the description of the rocket as an intercontinental ballistic missile and said the weapon may have been a medium-range missile.

Haley retorted that the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, the United States and North Korea all described the weapon as an ICBM, adding that if Russia needed intelligence to prove it, “I’m

happy to provide it.”

South Korea’s president, Moon Jae In, and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, moved to head off any immediate American military response when they met in Hamburg ahead of the G20 summit.

After a 75-minute meeting, the two leaders emphasised the need for the G20 to show a united response to the crisis, and described North Korea’s test-launch as “unforgivable” and agreed to impose tougher sanctions on Pyongyang.

But in meetings with Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, Moon warned against a military response, saying: “Amid high tensions like this a single accident could bring about a dangerous situation. So both increasing the pressure and managing the situation are required.”

The Chinese finance minister, Zhu Guangyao, said Beijing would implement all sanctions agreed by the UN, but urged the US not to use its domestic laws to find a backdoor route to imposing sanctions on Chinese financial institutions.

Moon, a liberal recently elected on a ticket backing dialogue with the North said in a speech in Berlin “now is the last chance, and also the best, for North Korea to make the right choice”.

He presented his five-point policy towards the North, including a commitment to peace, and a “denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula in a way that guarantees the security of the North Korean regime.”

He also offered humanitarian aid to the North Korean people and meetings between family members who have been separated since the Korean war.

He said: “We do not wish for the collapse of North Korea and we will not pursue any form of unification by absorbing the other. We will not pursue unification by force.”

Trump is scheduled to meet Xi on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hamburg, where he will travel from Poland later on Thursday.

Trump and Vladimir Putin are also expected to address growing North Korean provocations at their meeting on Friday.

China has already called for restraint from all sides, after joining diplomatic forces with Russia to suggest that North Korea suspend its missile programme in return for a moratorium on large-scale US and South Korean military exercises.

China is pushing for talks between world powers and North Korea on dismantling its nuclear programme but the US maintains that Pyongyang must first halt its missile and nuclear tests.

Theresa May also condemned North Korea’s actions and called for China to exert more pressure on its neighbour. The UK prime minister, who will have the opportunity to raise the issue with Xi on Friday evening at the G20 summit, added that Britain would support sanctions on Pyongyang.

“What I think needs to happen is first of all we absolutely condemn the action that North Korea has taken. What we need to see is a China who can exercise influence on North Korea playing a greater role in doing that,” May told reporters as her plane landed in Germany on Thursday. “If there are proposals to tighten sanctions and extend sanctions we will do that.”

Kim delivered his own message on Wednesday, with the state Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)

quoting him as saying: “American bastards would be not very happy with this gift sent on the July 4 anniversary.” [1]

The news agency claimed the North Korean missile was capable of carrying a “large, heavy nuclear warhead” that could survive re-entry into the earth’s atmosphere.

Kim was quoted as saying the North’s long confrontation with Washington had entered the “final stage” and that Pyongyang would not put its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles up for negotiation “unless the US hostile policy and nuclear threats come to an end completely”.

A report in its state media said Kim urged his scientists to “frequently send big and small ‘gift packages’ to the Yankees”.

Questions remain about whether the North can miniaturise a nuclear weapon to fit a missile nosecone, or if it has mastered the technology needed for it to survive re-entry into the earth’s atmosphere.

Some experts believe the North already has the ability to mount warheads on shorter-range missiles that can strike South Korea and Japan, home to dozens of US military bases and about 80,000 US troops.

Emma Graham-Harrison in London, **Patrick Wintour** in Hamburg and **Sabrina Siddiqui** in Washington

Additional reporting Anushka Asthana

* The Guardian. Thursday 6 July 2017 21.50 BST First published on Thursday 6 July 2017 08.41 BST: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/06/us-could-use-military-force-against-north-korea-says-nikki-haley>

How the US could respond to North Korea’s nuclear threat

Experts weigh in on a possible US reaction to North Korea’s successful intercontinental ballistic missile test, from further sanctions to diplomacy.

Public urgency about the threat of North Korea developing a reliable long-range nuclear weapon capable of striking the US was sharpened by news of what Pyongyang and outside analysts [2] say was a successful intercontinental ballistic missile test.

Any immediate US response must take into account the ability of North Korea to instantly launch a devastating strike against allies in Japan and South Korea, including the almost 30,000 US troops stationed on the Korean peninsula, with chemical, biological or possibly nuclear weapons. Conflict with China lurks as an additional grave concern.

What should or can the US do? Over the past two weeks, judging by his Twitter account, Donald Trump appears to have abandoned his original policy on North Korea, which was to rely on China to pressure its neighbor and trading partner to scrap its nuclear program.

While some experts stated clearly months ago that Trump's policy would not work [3], other influential voices, such as an independent taskforce convened last year by the Council on Foreign Relations, strongly supported such a policy, urging US officials to "undertake a major diplomatic effort to elevate the issue to the top of the US-China bilateral relationship".

The options currently on the table for the US break down roughly into four categories: sanctions and embargoes; diplomacy and concessions; cyber sabotage; and other military options. Here is a summary of expert opinion and analysis on each.

Sanctions and embargoes

North Korea has been the target of various financial and trade sanctions, including sanctions targeting the country's key coal exports and an oil embargo [4], since it conducted its first nuclear test in 2006.

After the death of American exchange student Otto Warmbier following his detention in North Korea last month, the US expanded its sanctions policy to include secondary sanctions on a Chinese bank and two Chinese individuals for providing North Korea with access to international markets.

"We should be sending teams all over the world to shut down financial assets, enforce sanctions and interdict materials the regime uses for weapons," wrote Wendy R Sherman, the chief US negotiator in the Iran nuclear deal. "We should press the United Nations to do more."

But North Korea's economy has not been crippled by sanctions, thanks in part to the continued trade with China.

"North Korea is far better off now than it was 11 years ago, and worlds apart from the famine of the 1990s," wrote Benjamin Silverstein in *The Diplomat*. "Food insecurity prevails in North Korea but the country has not seen widespread starvation since the late 1990s." [5]

And "if we were going to impose crippling sanctions" Van Jackson, a defense expert at Victoria University, told the Asia New Zealand foundation, "the time to do it would have been well before it had nuclear-capable missiles, not after."

Diplomacy and concessions

"Negotiate or else," Jim Walsh of the MIT security studies program advised in a piece last week published by Axios [6]:

"During the nuclear age, dozens countries started down the path to nuclear weapons but reversed course. And there are cases where countries acquired or inherited nuclear weapons gave them up outright. Often, that happy result was accomplished not through war but diplomacy - agreements that stopped or rolled back a nuclear weapons program."

"Opening dialogue is neither a reward nor a concession to North Korea; it is simply the only realistic way to reduce the growing dangers," reads a new *Guardian* piece in support of negotiations:

"Technological solutions - disabling launches through electronic or cyber attacks, or intercepting missiles - will be at best only partially successful. Sanctions may be part of the answer, but history shows that they are not in themselves a solution. The administration has flirted repeatedly with military options, and there is a grave risk that its interest in them may revive, despite the immense dangers. The prospects of destroying the nuclear arsenal - still less conventional stockpiles - would be low, the prospects of devastating repercussions for Seoul high and the chances of a wider

destabilisation of the region significant...

However Jackson, the Victoria University analyst, doubts the efficacy of diplomacy. In Jackson's analysis [7], "nothing much will change in the coming days and months unless 1) the US attacks; 2) the US imposes secondary sanctions on Chinese firms...; or 3) the US pivots its North Korea policy away from denuclearisation and figures out how to live with a nuclear-armed North Korea."

Cyber warfare

The US has been keeping up a secret program of cyber attacks and other nonconventional warfare against North Korea since 2014, David Sanger and William Broad first reported in the *New York Times* in March [8].

"Advocates of the sophisticated effort to remotely manipulate data inside North Korea's missile systems argue the United States has no real alternative because the effort to stop the North from learning the secrets of making nuclear weapons has already failed," the journalists wrote. "The only hope now is stopping the country from developing an intercontinental missile, and demonstrating that destructive threat to the world."

The problem with cyber attacks, electronic warfare and industrial sabotage, the authors noted, is that the arsenal "carries no guarantees" of effective prevention, as the world saw on Tuesday.

Military options

In response to the North Korean provocation, US and Korean forces undertook a joint live-fire missile exercise on Wednesday. A joint statement afterwards warning of possible military action.

"Self restraint, which is a choice, is all that separates armistice and war," the statement said. "As this Alliance missile live fire shows, we are able to change our choice when so ordered by our Alliance national leaders. It would be a grave mistake for anyone to believe anything to the contrary."

The military options on the table range from beefing up the South Korea-based THAAD (Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense), a wider attack on North Korea or even an attempt to assassinate the North Korean leader.

National security adviser HR McMaster appears to have moved in a matter of weeks toward military action. On 29 June, following the death of Warmbier and continued North Korean test activity, McMaster warned, "The threat is much more immediate now and so it's clear that we can't repeat the same approach - failed approach of the past."

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial board openly urged regime change, writing [9]: "Only a much tougher strategy aimed at toppling the Kim regime, with or without China's help, has a chance of eliminating a threat that puts millions of American lives at risk. The best option is a comprehensive strategy to change the Kim regime, as former undersecretary of state Robert Joseph has argued."

In contrast, Daniel Larison of the American Conservative wrote [10]: "Seeking regime change in North Korea would be extremely dangerous and foolish. It would put millions of lives in jeopardy by risking war with the current regime. In the very unlikely event that this policy somehow 'worked' as intended, it would still create massive upheaval that would swamp South Korea with an unmanageable refugee crisis."

Summarizing the situation in the *Atlantic* [11], Mark Bowden breaks down military options into

either the complete devastation of Pyongyang or a “turn the screws” approach to hit selected reactors or nuclear test sites – attacks designed somehow to avoid all-out war. Bowden spoke with experts who said the “devastation” scenario was politically not feasible on a global scale and maybe not militarily doable anyway.

Bowden wrote:

“Suppose that US forces could be positioned secretly, and that President Moon were on board. Suppose, further, that Pyongyang’s nukes could be disabled swiftly, its artillery batteries completely silenced, its missile platforms flattened, its leadership taken out—all before a counterstrike of any consequence could be made. And suppose still further that North Korea’s enormous army could be rapidly defeated, and that friendly casualties would remain surprisingly low, and that South Korea’s economy would not be significantly hurt. And suppose yet further that China and Russia agreed to sit on the sidelines and watch their longtime ally fall. Then Kim Jong Un, with his bad haircut and his legion of note-taking, big-hat-wearing, kowtowing generals, would be gone. South Korea’s fear of invasion from the North, gone. The menace of the state’s using chemical and biological weapons, gone. The nuclear threat, gone.”

Such a stunning outcome would be a mighty triumph indeed! It would be a truly awesome display of American power and know-how.

What would be left? North Korea, a country of more than 25 million people, would be adrift.

In lieu of straightforward solutions to the North Korea conundrum, the US leadership has at times reverted to silence.

“The United States has spoken enough about North Korea,” US secretary of state Rex Tillerson said in a statement after a missile launch in early April. “We have no further comment.”

Tom McCarthy in New York

* The Guardian. Wednesday 5 July 2017 20.57 BST Last modified on Wednesday 5 July 2017 21.37 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/05/north-korea-nuclear-threat-us-response-donald-trump>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/05/a-gift-for-the-american-bastards-north-koreas-kim-fires-back-at-trump>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/04/are-north-koreas-missile-claims-true-and-what-do-they-signify>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/05/a-gift-for-the-american-bastards-north-koreas-kim-fires-back-at-trump>

[4] ESSF (article 41478), [North Korea: Donald Trump’s romance with China’s Xi has cooled, ‘ass-](#)

[kicking' could lie ahead.](#)

[5] ESSF (article 41481), [North Korea's ICBM Test, Byungjin, and the Economic Logic.](#)

[6] <https://www.axios.com/negotiate-or-else-2446363355.html>

[7] <http://www.asianz.org.nz/bulletin/van-jackson-north-korea-icbm-missile>

[8] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/04/world/asia/left-of-launch-missile-defense.html>

[9] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-north-korean-missile-crisis-1499188198>

[10] <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/larison/the-mindless-hawkish-response-to-north-korea-missile-test/comment-page-1/>

[11] <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/07/the-worst-problem-on-earth/528717/>