Peace on the Korean Peninsula

Background Information

Solidarity Peace Delegation of the Task Force to Stop THAAD in Korea and Militarism in Asia and the Pacific and Channing and Popai Liem Education Foundation

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THE PROGRESSIVE

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The Long, Dirty History of U.S. Warmongering against North Korea

By Christine Hong

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence with Army Gen. Vincent K. Brooks at the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea, April 17, 2017.

As the latest North Korea crisis unfolded, and Donald Trump swapped campaign plowshares for post-inauguration swords, Americans took to the streets demanding that the President release his tax returns and then marched for science. There were no mass protests for peace.

Although the substance of Trump's foreign policy remains opaque, he had campaigned on an "America First" critique of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's liberal interventionism in Libya and, to his own party's mortification, blasted George W. Bush's neoconservative adventurism in Iraq.

Once in the White House, though, Trump announced he would boost the U.S. military budget by a staggering $54 billion and cut back on diplomacy, while pushing the United States to the brink of active conflict with North Korea. None of this provoked a major backlash. To the contrary, Trump's surprise bombing of Syria, which, his administration declared, doubled as a warning for North Korea, garnered him across-the-aisle praise from hawks in both parties and his highest approval ratings so far.

The American public's quietism with regard to the prospect of renewed U.S. aggression against North Korea is remarkable. It stands in stark contrast to the broad anti-war galvanization in the post-9/11 lead-up to the U.S. war in Iraq and the widespread protests against the Vietnam War in an earlier era.

To some degree, it recalls the muted mid-twentieth century political terrain that led to the Korean War—a brutal, dirty, and unresolved conflict that set the model for subsequent U.S. intervention. One of the few voices of opposition, Paul Robeson, in a critique that resonates to this day, lambasted his fellow citizens' "meek conformity with the policies of the war-minded, the racists, and the rich."

That "the maw of war-makers [was] insatiable" in Korea, as Robeson remarked in 1950, could be seen in the massive devastation of human life. The Korean War was an asymmetrical conflict in which the United States monopolized the skies, raining down ruin. Four million Koreans—the vast majority of them civilians—were killed. Chinese statistics indicate that North Korea lost thirty percent of its population. In North Korea where no family was left unscathed by the

terroristic violence of the Korean War, anti-Americanism thus cannot be dismissed as state ideology alone.

More than almost anyone in the world, North Koreans know intimately what it means to be in the crosshairs of the American war machine. In May 1951, writer and activist Monica Felton observed that in the course of her travels through North Korea as part of an international fact-finding delegation, “the same scenes of destruction repeated themselves over and over again . . . . The destruction, in fact, is so overwhelming that if the war is allowed to continue—even for another few months—there will be nothing left of Korea. Nothing at all.” It is no coincidence that the phoenix serves as one of North Korea’s national emblems.

Then, as now, Korea rested in the hazy recesses of American consciousness, mostly out of sight, mostly out of mind. When recently asked to comment on the catastrophe that would ensue were Trump to authorize a preemptive strike against North Korea, Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, responded with chilling candor:

Yes, it would be terrible, but the war would be over there. It wouldn’t be here. It would be bad for the Korean peninsula, it would be bad for China, it would be bad for Japan, it would be bad for South Korea, it would be the end of North Korea but what it would not do is hit America.

Although famously at odds with Trump on numerous other matters, Graham here captured the pyrrhic spirit of the President’s “America First” foreign policy, a self-privileging worldview that allows for untold ruin and suffering so long as they remain far from our shores.

Graham’s statement is in keeping with the time-honored American tradition of envisioning apocalypse for North Korea—a tradition that survived the Cold War’s end and has served as through-line across successive U.S. presidencies. In recent days, we have been told that the United States must entertain all possible scenarios against North Korea as an interloper in the nuclear club, including a preemptive nuclear strike.

It has been drilled into our heads that North Korea poses a clear and chronic danger, a threat not just to the United States and its allies in Asia and the Pacific, but also to all of humanity. Yet as Donald MacIntyre, Seoul bureau chief for *Time* magazine during the George W. Bush era, has observed, when it comes to North Korea, Western media has faithfully adhered to a "demonization script" and in so doing has helped to "lay the groundwork for war." Conditioned by jingoistic portraits of the North Korean enemy—"axis of evil," "outpost of tyranny," "rogue state"—and complacent in our displacement of risk *onto them, not us*, we consent to North Korea's extinction in advance.

Instability in Korea has, for several decades, lined the pockets of those who profit from the business of war. Indeed, the Korean War rehabilitated a U.S. economy geared, as a result of World War II, toward total war. Seized as opportunity, the war enabled the Truman administration to triple U.S. defense spending, and furnished a rationale for the bilateral linking of Asian client states to the United States and the establishment of what Chalmers Johnson called an "empire of bases" in the Pacific. General James Van Fleet, the commanding officer of UN forces in Korea, described the war as "a blessing" and remarked, "There had to be a Korea either here or some place in the world."

As Cumings writes:

[I]t was the Korean War, not Greece or Turkey or the Marshall Plan or Vietnam, that inaugurated big defense budgets and the national security state, that transformed a limited containment doctrine into a global crusade, that ignited McCarthyism just as it seemed to fizzle, and thereby gave the Cold War its long run.

Fast-forward to the present: the portrait of an unpredictable nuclear-armed North Korea greases the cogs of the U.S. war machine and fuels the military-industrial complex. Within Asia and the

Pacific, this jingoistic portrait has justified the accelerated deployment of missile-defense systems in Guam and South Korea, the strategic positioning of nuclear aircraft carriers, the sales of military weapons, war exercises between the United States and its regional allies, and a forward-deployed U.S. military posture. Even as China is without question the main economic rival of the United States, an armed and dangerous North Korea furnishes the pretext for a heavily militarized U.S. presence in the region.

Unsurprisingly, few media outlets have reported on North Korea's overtures to the United States, even as these, if pursued, might result in meaningful de-escalation on both sides. To be clear: peaceful alternatives are at hand. Far from being an intractable foe, North Korea has repeatedly asked the United States to sign a peace treaty that would bring the unresolved Korean War to a long-overdue end.

It has also proposed that the United States cease its annual war games with South Korea—games, we must recognize, that involve the simulated invasion and occupation of North Korea, the "decapitation" of its leadership, and rehearsals of a preemptive nuclear strike. In return, North Korea will cap its nuclear weapons testing. China has reiterated this proposal. The United States maintains that its joint war games with South Korea are simply business as usual and has not seen fit to respond.

With the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism rearing their heads in our current moment, we have cause to be gravely concerned. During his recent anti-North Korea tour of Asia and the Pacific, Vice President Mike Pence grimly stated, "The sword stands ready," with no sense that plowshares might be in the offing. The implication in the Trump administration's words ("all options are on the table," "rogue state," "behaving very badly") and deeds (the U.S. bombings of Syria and Afghanistan) is that force is the only lingua franca available, and that with North Korea, we must learn war over and over again.

Almost seventy years ago, we entered into a war with North Korea that has never ended. At the time, only a handful of Americans raised their voices in opposition. Let's not let the historical record reflect our silence now.

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FAIR

April 11, 2017

‘The Only Sensible Path at This Point is Dialogue’

CounterSpin interview with Hyun Lee on North Korea

Janine Jackson: The **Washington Post** suggests that people in Seattle and San Francisco “should be worried” about being hit by a ballistic missile from North Korea, citing an analyst who described such an event, a bit cryptically, as “a looming threat but not a current threat.”

If the concern is that the saber-rattling between Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump could indeed have dire consequences, it’s hard to see how such stories help, or maps that show ranges for North Korea’s missiles far greater than any actually tested missiles have gone, or the conflation of nuclear and non-nuclear weaponry. But we’re equally ill-served by a failure to interrogate US policy on the Korean peninsula, and corporate media’s reduction of North Korea to caricature in the time-honored method reserved for official enemies.

As we record this show Trump is meeting with China's President Xi Jinping, and we're told North Korea is at the top of the agenda, Trump having declared, "If China is not going to solve North Korea, we will." What does that mean, and how has it come to this? We're joined now by writer and activist Hyun Lee of **Zoom in Korea**, a project of the Solidarity Committee for Democracy and Peace in Korea. She's also a Fellow at the Korea Policy Institute. Welcome to **CounterSpin**, Hyun Lee.

Hyun Lee: Hi. Thanks for having me.

JJ: Well, the Chinese foreign minister just described the US and North Korea as like two accelerating trains coming toward each other with neither side willing to give way, and I think people may well wonder how we got to such a disturbing point. Let's start with the US. What, historically, have been the US's intentions or goals with regard to North Korea, and have those changed?

HL: So, many people in the United States don't realize that the US has maintained the threat of a nuclear attack against North Korea for decades. From 1958 to 1991, the US had hundreds of nuclear weapons in the southern half of the Korean peninsula, in South Korea. So at that time, North Korea's countermeasure to deter a US nuclear attack was to forward deploy all of its conventional forces near the DMZ.

In 2001, when George W. Bush came to power, many things changed. There were technological advancements, and he also made doctrinal changes, centered around very high-tech, precision-capable weapons that gave the US preemptive strike advantage. He named North Korea part of the "Axis of Evil." He also listed North Korea as one of seven countries that were potential targets for a US preemptive strike in the US Nuclear Posture Review. So then, in response to that, North Korea had to develop a new kind of deterrent, and that's when it seriously turned to developing nuclear weapons, and its first nuclear test was in 2006.

Since that time, what the United States has tried to do is stall North Korea's nuclear development, tying it up through negotiations that basically went nowhere, at the same time constantly threatening to bring about North Korea's collapse, through

sanctions that were crippling its economy, and also military exercises that were very provocative. They simulate war plans that now include the decapitation of the North Korean leadership, and include nuclear first strike.

US/North Korean relations during the Obama administration was a contest between Obama's policy of "strategic patience," which is basically waiting and preparing for the eventual collapse of the North Korean regime, and then North Korea's policy called *byungjin*, which was making parallel progress in economic development, and also developing its nuclear deterrence capability.

Towards the end of Obama's presidency, the consensus in Washington was that strategic patience had basically failed. North Korea obviously has not collapsed. On the contrary, many people who have been there recently come back and report that they've made progress in their economic development, and now experts are warning that North Korea will soon have, if it doesn't already have, the capability of launching an ICBM with a miniaturized nuclear warhead that can strike the continental United States. Kim Jong-Un's New Year's speech earlier this year contained a message that basically they were ready to test-launch an ICBM.

So that's basically how we got to this situation. The US and South Korean militaries are now developing and also deploying missile defense capability. The aim of that is basically neutralizing North Korea's nuclear weapons. So now, in response to that, what North Korea is doing is developing countermeasures that can evade the missile defense system, and that's what the recent missile tests have been about. So it's this basic back-and-forth, cat-and-mouse game of US developing nuclear first-strike capabilities, and then North Korea developing deterrence capabilities.

And we've become very confused in the United States, because the mainstream media like to exaggerate the North Korean nuclear threat, but we never get news of what the US has been doing over the past decades. And we should be very clear that what this is all about is actually US nuclear first-strike advantage against North Korea, and North Korea reacting to that by developing its deterrence capability.

JJ: Well, yes, reporting is this world where there's just an unspoken acceptance of the legitimacy of the United States doing things that official enemies are not allowed to do. The very idea of strategic patience—we're just going to wait until the regime collapses—we can understand why North Koreans might not want to co-sign that as a plan. But it also depends so much about where you start the clock. In the US media, as you've said, it's always North Korea taking the provocative action and the United States responding, and that's getting it backwards, you think.

HL: You know, there is a double standard in US condemnation of North Korean missile tests, because the US also continuously tests ballistic missiles. In 2015 alone, the US flight-tested the Minuteman 3 ICBM from California, from the Vandenberg Air Force Base, five times in 2015 alone. So, I mean, every country has a sovereign right to test its weapons capability. That's how you know if it works or not, and that's precisely what North Korea is doing. So we should also note that there is a double standard there.

JJ: What concerns do you have specifically about what looks like being the Trump administration's approach? We've seen both Trump and Nikki Haley say China has to deal with North Korea, and that's supposedly the point, or one of the points, of this meeting with Xi Jinping. What do you make of that?

HL: Many experts have noted that it is not a good idea for the United States to outsource its North Korea policy to China. First of all, we should be very clear that the two countries have very different strategic interests in the region. So it is not a good idea, from the US point of view, to rely on China so much to carry out its policy, because it doesn't make sense.

China has made very clear to the United States that if it wants cooperation in North Korea, it should first reverse its very controversial decision on the deployment of the THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea, that is right now in the process of being deployed, and it is a very controversial issue. It probably will be on the agenda of the summit this weekend. China considers the THAAD system, if it's

based in South Korea, a threat to its security, because the radar that comes with the system can be used for surveillance activity on Chinese missiles.

And so far, the Trump administration has been very aggressive in pushing THAAD deployment forward. Meanwhile, people in South Korea have been opposed to it, and are protesting every day outside the deployment site. If the US continues to push that forward it may make it very difficult to get Chinese cooperation on North Korea.

Secondly, China does not want the collapse of the North Korean regime, because that would create a huge refugee crisis at its border, and that's the last thing that China wants. China also does not want the prospect of a unified Korean peninsula that is led by a pro-US South Korean government right next door as its neighbor.

So for all of these reasons, it's probably not a good idea for the US to rely on China to carry out its policy, based on its strategic interest. It is more in US interest to negotiate directly with North Korea for North Korea to basically cap its nuclear and missile tests.

JJ: That moves me to the final question, because I'd like to talk about other ways forward. We know media get into saber-rattling mode, and it gets very difficult to hear other voices—and people who seek peace, or an end to conflict, are almost in a parallel conversation. But what possible ways forward do you see for those who seek an end to the conflict?

HL: The only sensible path at this point is dialogue: sitting down with North Korea and coming up with a fundamental solution to the crisis. We should note that last year in July, North Korea basically put out a statement that was not picked up or noticed by the Western media. But it laid out the terms for denuclearization, and all of the conditions that it laid out had to do with removing the threat to its sovereignty that's posed by US nuclear weapons. That gives an indication that that's what the North Koreans are fundamentally interested in resolving.

So a fundamental solution in my mind would be, first of all, ending the annual provocative war exercises that the United States military does every year in South Korea, abandoning the US nuclear first-strike prerogative, and then signing a peace treaty that will bring closure to the unended Korean War, eventually leading to the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean peninsula.

And then, in exchange, North Korea should halt its nuclear weapons development—meaning no more tests, no more nuclear tests or no more missile tests, basically capping it—and a commitment to nonproliferation. In my mind, that is the only sensible path to resolve the current situation.

JJ: We've been speaking with Hyun Lee of **Zoom in Korea**, online at **ZoomInKorea.org**. Thank you very much for joining us this week on **CounterSpin**.

HL: Thank you.

May 26, 2017

The Need for a New US Foreign Policy towards North Korea

By Martin Hart-Landsberg

US-North Korean relations remain very tense, although the threat of a new Korean War has thankfully receded. Still the US government remains determined to tighten economic sanctions on North Korea and continues to plan for a military strike aimed at destroying the country's nuclear infrastructure. And the North for its part has made it clear that it would respond to any attack with its own strikes against US bases in the region and even the US itself.

This is not good, but it is important to realize that what is happening is not new. The US began conducting war games with South Korean forces in 1976 and it was not long before those included simulated nuclear attacks against the North, and that was before North Korea had nuclear weapons. In 1994, President Bill Clinton was close to launching a military attack on North Korea with the aim of destroying its nuclear facilities. In 2002, President Bush talked about seizing North Korean ships as part of a blockade of the country, which is an act of war. In 2013, the US conducted war games which involved planning for preemptive attacks on North Korean military targets and "decapitation" of the North Korean leadership and even a first strike nuclear attack.

I don't think we are on the verge of a new Korean war, but the cycle of belligerency and threat making on both sides is intensifying. And it is always possible that a miscalculation could in fact trigger a new war, with devastating consequences. The threat of war, perhaps a nuclear war, is nothing to play around with. But – and this is important — even if a new war is averted, the ongoing embargo against North Korea and continual threats of war are themselves costly: they promote/legitimatize greater military spending and militarization more generally, at the expense of needed social programs, in Japan, China, the US, and the two Koreas. They also create a situation that

compromises democratic possibilities in both South and North Korea and worsen already difficult economic conditions in North Korea.

There is a choice for peace

We don't have to go down this road—we have another option—but it is one that the US government is unwilling to consider, much less discuss. That option is for the US to accept North Korean offers of direct negotiations between the two countries, with all issues on the table.

The US government and media dismiss this option as out of hand—we are told that (1) the North is a hermit kingdom and seeks only isolation, (2) the country is ruled by crazy people hell bent on war, and (3) the North Korean leadership cannot be trusted to follow through on its promises. But none of this is true.

First: if being a hermit kingdom means never wanting to negotiate, then North Korea is not a hermit kingdom. North Korea has been asking for direct talks with the United States since the early 1990s. The reason is simple: this is when the USSR ended and Russia and the former Soviet bloc countries in central Europe moved to adopt capitalism. The North was dependent on trade with these countries and their reorientation left the North Korean economy isolated and in crisis.

The North Korean leadership decided that they had to break out of this isolation and connect the North Korean economy to the global economy, and this required normalization of relations with the United States. Since then, they have repeatedly asked for unconditional direct talks with the US in hopes of securing an end to the Korean War and a peace treaty as a first step towards their desired normalization of relations, but have been repeatedly rebuffed. The US has always put preconditions on those talks, preconditions that always change whenever the North has taken steps to meet them.

The North has also tried to join the IMF and WB, but the US and Japan have blocked their membership.

The North has also tried to set up free trade zones to attract foreign investment, but the US and Japan have worked to block that investment.

So, it is not the North that is refusing to talk or broaden its engagement with the global economy; it is the US that seeks to keep North Korea isolated.

Second: the media portray North Korea as pursuing an out of control militarism that is the main cause of the current dangerous situation. But it is important to recognize that South Korea has outspent North Korea on military spending every year since 1976. International agencies currently estimate that North Korean annual military spending is $4 billion while South Korean annual military spending is $40 billion. And then we have to add the US military build-up.

North Korea does spend a high percentage of its budget on the military, but that is because it has no reliable military ally and a weak economy. However, it has largely responded to South Korean and US militarism and threats, not driven them. As for the development of a nuclear weapons program: it was the US that brought nuclear weapons to the Korean peninsula. It did so in 1958 in violation of the Korean War armistice and threatened North Korea with nuclear attack years before the North even sought to develop nuclear weapons.

Third: North Korea has been a more reliable negotiating partner than the US. Here we have to take up the nuclear issue more directly. The North has tested a nuclear weapon 5 times: 2006, 2009, 2013, and twice in 2016.

Critically, North Korean tests have largely been conducted in an effort to pull the US into negotiations or fulfill past promises. And the country has made numerous offers to halt its testing and even freeze its nuclear weapons program if only the US would agree to talks.

North Korea was first accused of developing nuclear weapons in early 1990s. Its leadership refused to confirm or deny that the country had succeeded in manufacturing nuclear weapons but said that it would open up its facilities for inspection if the US

would enter talks to normalize relations. As noted above, the North was desperate, in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, to draw the US into negotiations. In other words, it was ready to end the hostilities between the two countries.

The US government refused talks and began to mobilize for a strike on North Korean nuclear facilities. A war was averted only because Jimmy Carter, against the wishes of the Clinton administration, went to the North, met Kim Il Sung, and negotiated an agreement that froze the North Korean nuclear program.

The North Korean government agreed to end their country's nuclear weapons program in exchange for aid and normalization. And from 1994 to 2002 the North froze its plutonium program and had all nuclear fuel observed by international inspectors to assure the US that it was not engaged in making any nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, the US did not live up to its side of the bargain; it did not deliver the aid it promised or take meaningful steps towards normalization.

In 2001 President Bush declared North Korea to be part of the axis of evil and the following year unilaterally canceled the agreement. In response, the North restarted its nuclear program.

In 2003, the Chinese government, worried about growing tensions between the US and North Korea, convened multiparty talks to bring the two countries back to negotiations. Finally, in 2005, under Chinese pressure, the US agreed to a new agreement, in which each North Korean step towards ending its weapons program would be matched by a new US step towards ending the embargo and normalizing relations. But exactly one day after signing the agreement, the US asserted, without evidence, that North Korea was engaged in a program of counterfeiting US dollars and tightened its sanctions policy against North Korea.

The North Korean response was to test its first nuclear bomb in 2006. And shortly afterwards, the US agreed to drop its counterfeiting charge and comply with the agreement it had previously signed.

In 2007 North Korea shut down its nuclear program and even began dismantling its nuclear facilities—but the US again didn't follow through on the terms of the agreement, falling behind on its promised aid and sanction reductions. In fact, the US kept escalating its demands on North Korea, calling for an end to North Korea's missile program and improvement in human rights in addition to the agreed upon steps to end North Korea's nuclear weapons program. And so, frustrated, North Korea tested another nuclear weapon in 2009.

And the US responded by tightening sanctions.

In 2012 the North launched two satellites. The first failed, the second succeeded. Before each launch the US threatened to go to the UN and secure new sanctions on North Korea. But the North asserted its right to launch satellites and went ahead. After the December 2012 launch, the UN agreed to further sanctions and the North responded with its third nuclear test in 2013.

This period marks a major change in North Korean policy. The North now changed its public stance: it declared itself a nuclear state—and announced that it was no longer willing to give up its nuclear weapons. However, the North Korean government made clear that it would freeze its nuclear weapons program if the US would cancel its future war games. The US refused and its March 2013 war games included practice runs of nuclear equipped bombers and planning for occupying North Korea. The North has therefore continued to test and develop its nuclear weapons capability.

Here is the point: whenever the US shows willingness to negotiate, the North responds. And when agreements are signed, it is the US that has abandoned them. The North has pushed forward with its nuclear weapons program largely in an attempt to force the US to seriously engage with the North because it believes that this program is its only bargaining chip. And it is desperate to end the US embargo on its economy.

We lost the opportunity to negotiate with a non-nuclear North Korea when we cut off negotiations in 2001, before the country had a nuclear arsenal. Things have changed. Now, the most we can reasonably expect is an agreement that freezes that

arsenal. However, if relations between the two countries truly improve it may well be possible to achieve a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, an outcome both countries profess to seek.

New possibilities and our responsibilities

So, why does the US refuse direct negotiations and risk war? The most logical reason is that there are powerful forces opposing them. Sadly, the tension is useful to the US military industrial complex, which needs enemies to support the ongoing build-up of the military budget. The tension also allows the US military to maintain troops on the Asian mainland and forces in Japan. It also helps to isolate China and boost right-wing political tendencies in Japan and South Korea. And now, after decades of demonizing North Korea, it is difficult for the US political establishment to change course.

However, the outcome of the recent presidential election in South Korea might open possibilities to force a change in US policy. Moon Jae-in, the winner, has repudiated the hardline policies of his impeached predecessor Park Geun-Hye, and declared his commitment to re-engage with the North. The US government was not happy about his victory, but it cannot easily ignore Moon's call for a change in South Korean policy towards North Korea, especially since US actions against the North are usually presented as necessary to protect South Korea. Thus, if Moon follows through on his promises, the US may well be forced to moderate its own policy towards the North.

What is clear is that we in the US have a responsibility to become better educated about US policy towards both Koreas, to support popular movements in South Korea that seek peaceful relations with North Korea and progress towards reunification, and to work for a US policy that promotes the demilitarization and normalization of US-North Korean relations.

I discuss this history of US-North Korean relations and current developments in South Korea in a May 8 interview on KBOO radio; you can hear the interview here: http://kboo.fm/media/57730-how-us-has-provoked-north-korea

To keep up on developments I encourage you to visit the following two websites:
Korea Policy Institute: kpolicy.org
ZoominKorea: zoominkorea.org

What's Left

March 13, 2017

Pentagon Leads over 300,000 Troops in a Rehearsal for an Invasion One Week after the White House Announces It's Considering Military Action against North Korea

By Stephen Gowans

The United States and South Korea are conducting their largest-ever military exercises on the Korean peninsula [1], one week after the White House announced that it was considering military action against North Korea to bring about regime change. [2] The US-led exercises involve:

• 300,000 South Korea troops
• 17,000 US troops
• The supercarrier USS Carl Vinson
• US F-35B and F-22 stealth fighters
• US B-18 and B-52 bombers
• South Korean F-15s and KF-16s jetfighters. [3]

While the United States labels the drills as "purely defensive" [4] the nomenclature is misleading. The exercises are not defensive in the sense of practicing to repel a possible North Korean invasion and to push North Korean forces back across the 38th parallel in the event of a North Korean attack, but envisage an invasion of North Korea in order to incapacitate its nuclear weapons, destroy its military command, and assassinate its leader.

The exercises can only be construed as "defensive" if undertaken as preparation for a response to an actual North Korean first-strike, or as a rehearsed pre-emptive response to an anticipated first strike. In either event, the exercises are invasion-related, and Pyongyang's complaint that US and South Korean forces are practicing an invasion is valid.

But the likelihood of a North Korean attack on South Korea is vanishingly small. Pyongyang is outspent militarily by Seoul by a factor of almost 4:1, [5] and South Korean forces can rely on more advanced weapons systems than can North Korea. Additionally, the South Korean military is not only backed up by, but is under the command of, the unprecedentedly powerful US military. A North Korean attack on South Korea would be suicidal, and therefore we can regard its possibility as virtually non-existent, especially in light of US nuclear doctrine which allows the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea. Indeed, US leaders have reminded North Korean leaders on numerous occasions that their country could be turned into "a charcoal briquette." [6] That anyone of consequence in the US state truly believes that South Korea is under threat of an attack by the North is risible.

The exercises are being carried out within the framework of Operation Plan 5015 which "aims to remove the North's weapons of mass destruction and prepare … for a pre-emptive strike in the event of an imminent North Korean attack, as well a 'decapitation' raids targeting the leadership." [7]

In connection with decapitation raids, the exercises involve "US Special Missions Units responsible for the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, including SEAL Team Six." [8] According to one newspaper report, the "participation of special forces in the drills…may be an indication the two sides are rehearsing the assassination of Kim Jong Un." [9]

A US official told South Korea's Yonhap news agency that "A bigger number of and more diverse US special operation forces will take part in this year's … exercises to practice missions to infiltrate the North, remove the North's war command and demolish its key military facilities." [10]

Astonishingly, despite participating in the highly provocative exercises–which can have no other consequence than to rattle the North Koreans and place them under imminent threat—the South Korean ministry of national defense announced that "South Korea and the US were keenly monitoring the movements of North Korean soldiers in preparation for possible provocations." [11]

The notion that Washington and Seoul must be on the alert for North Korean 'provocations', at a time the Pentagon and its South Korean ally are rehearsing an invasion and 'decapitation' strike against North Korea, represents what East Asia specialist Tim Beal calls a "special sort of unreality." [12] Adding to the unreality is the fact that the rehearsal for an invasion comes on the heels of the White House announcing *urbi et orbi* that it is considering military action against North Korea to bring about regime change.

In 2015, the North Koreans proposed to suspend their nuclear weapons program in exchange for the United States suspending its military exercises on the peninsula. The US State Department peremptorily dismissed the offer, saying it inappropriately linked the United States' "routine" military drills to what Washington demanded of Pyongyang, namely, denuclearization. [13] Instead, Washington "insisted the North give up its nuclear weapons program first before any negotiations" could take place. [14]

In 2016, the North Koreans made the same proposal. Then US president Barack Obama replied that Pyongyang would "have to do better than that." [15]

At the same time, the high-profile Wall Street-directed Council on Foreign Relations released a task force report which advised Washington against striking a peace deal with North Korea on the grounds that Pyongyang would expect US troops to withdraw from the peninsula. Were the United States to quit the peninsula militarily, its strategic position relative to China and Russia, namely, its ability to threaten its two near-peer competitors, would be weakened, the report warned. Accordingly, Washington was adjured to refrain from promising Beijing that any help it provided in connection with North Korea would be rewarded by a reduction in the US troop presence on the peninsula. [16]

Earlier this month, China resurrected Pyongyang's perennial proposal. "To defuse the looming crisis on the peninsula, China [proposed] that, as a first step, [North Korea] suspend its missile and nuclear activities in exchange for a halt in the large scale US – [South Korea] exercises. This suspension-for-suspension," the Chinese argued, "can help us break out of the security dilemma and bring the parties back to the negotiating table." [17]

Washington rejected the proposal immediately. So too did Japan. The Japanese ambassador to the UN reminded the world that the US goal is "not a freeze-for-freeze but to denuclearize North Korea." [18] Implicit in this reminder was the addendum that the United States would take no steps to denuclearize its own approach to dealing with North Korea (Washington dangles a nuclear sword of Damocles over Pyongyang) and would continue to carry out annual rehearsals for an invasion.

Refusal to negotiate, or to demand that the other side immediately grant what is being demanded as a precondition for talks, (give me what I want, then I'll talk), is consistent with the approach to North Korea adopted by Washington as early as 2003. Urged by Pyongyang to negotiate a peace treaty, then US Secretary of State Colin Powell demurred. "We don't do non-aggression pacts or treaties, things of that nature," Powell explained. [19]

As part of the special unreality constructed by the United States, Russia, or more specifically its president, Vladimir Putin, is routinely accused by Washington of committing "aggressions," which are said to include military exercises along the Russian border with Ukraine. These exercises, hardly on the immense scale of the US-South Korean exercises, are labelled "highly provocative" [20] by US officials, while the Pentagon-led rehearsal for an invasion of North Korea is described as routine and "defensive in nature."

But imagine that Moscow had mobilized 300,000 Russian troops along the Ukraine border, under an operational plan to invade Ukraine, neutralize its military assets, destroy its military command, and assassinate its president, one week after the Kremlin declared that it was considering military action in Ukraine to bring about regime change. Who, except someone mired in a special sort of unreality, would construe this as "purely defensive in nature"?

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KOREA POLICY INSTITUTE

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Looking in the right direction: Establishing a framework for analyzing the situation on the Korean Peninsula (and much more besides)

By Tim Beal

Protesters against the largest ever U.S.- South Korea war games, at U.S. Embassy in Seoul, March 7, 2016. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

Hysteria, hypocrisy and self-harm amongst a shower of satellites

In the first half of February 2016 a number of satellites were launched; two by Japan, three by the United States, one each by Russia and China and one by North Korea. The other launches went unremarked outside the scientific community but the North Korean satellite was another matter; a very curious matter. It was, we were told, really a missile, an ICBM. 'North Korea is committed to striking the U.S. with a nuclear-armed missile' the Pentagon told Congress. This satellite launch was taken as indication of North Korea's wicked

intention. No matter that a satellite carrier rocket is a rather different beast to a missile. Satellites are designed to stay up in space and missiles to come down to deliver a warhead on a target – this missile was, in fact, a satellite launcher, no matter that the intention was clear. In the background, though, there is North Korea's KN-08 ICBM. It has not been tested, although it has been displayed, either the real thing or a mock-up, on parade in Pyongyang. The KN-08 "likely would be capable" of striking the continental U.S. if successfully designed and developed, said the Pentagon. A couple of assumptions there, lodged in a tautology – the KN-08 ICBM, if successfully designed and developed, would be a successful ICBM.

The North Korean satellite was roundly condemned by that fine institution 'the international community' because it had been launched by a ballistic rocket, and North Korea had been expressly forbidden to use ballistic rockets. No matter that all satellites are launched by ballistic rockets; that's the physics of it. No matter that there must be tens of thousands of ballistic rockets, of all sizes, military and civil, around the world. This prohibition only applied to North Korea.

The United States went to work trying to push a resolution through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to increase sanctions against North Korea. There is an interesting story here, only half-revealed. The U.S. moved to deploy more financial sanctions, utilizing its dominant position in world banking, designed, according to Andrei Lankov, to push 'the North Korean economy towards crisis' and famine. The beauty of this strategy is that, if successful, the malnourished children will be produced as evidence not of American ruthlessness, but of Kim Jong Un's desire to starve his own people. No one, so far, has asked John Kerry, in relation to sanctions against North Korea, the question asked of Madeleine Albright regarding sanctions against Iraq. When asked on 60-Minutes, May 12, 1996, by Leslie Stahl: "We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?" Albright paused briefly and replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think the price is worth it." She regretted her honesty that next day. Presumably that interview is now part of the induction process for senior U.S. officials, on questions to avoid answering.

Meanwhile, in South Korea, North Korea's satellite launch, preceded by its fourth nuclear test on January 6, 2016 (way behind America's thousand plus tests), caused the Park Geun-hye administration to move into high gear. The situation was used as a justification for pushing forward the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles, in spite of protests by Russia and especially China. No matter that the THAAD rockets would probably be ineffective against the missiles that North Korea actually has, but are rather part of missile defense against China and Russia. And no matter that North Korea's Unha satellite carrier rocket, even if converted to an ICBM, would pose no threat to South Korea. Again the physics; a ballistic trajectory means that you cannot use a long-range rocket to attack your immediate neighbor.

President Park closed down the Kaesong Industrial Park, causing losses of 800 billion won, nearly a billion dollars, for South Korean companies involved and reduced Inter-Korean relations to their lowest in decades, while warning of North Korea's 'collapse'. The word, 'collapse,' really used here as a euphemism, because no informed observer thinks that a collapse, in the real meaning of the word, is in the cards. Rather the contrary. The lawyer and investment consultant Michael Hay, based in Pyongyang, recently complained wryly in an interview with NK News that '"the country is in such a state of self-confidence – the highest level of self-confidence I have ever seen – that I perhaps think they may have a slightly less than full picture of how they are perceived from the outside, in terms of business assessment."

But President Park is probably using 'collapse' in a sort of Orwellian sense as indicated by the fractured grammar of a headline in the South China Morning Post – 'South Korea's President Park Signals Shift by Invoking Threat of 'Regime Collapse' against North Korea.' Now you can logically invoke a danger of collapse, or you can threaten invasion, but you cannot threaten collapse against a country. You can threaten someone that you will shoot him, but you can't threaten diabetes.

Does President Park have an invasion of the North in mind? Hopefully not, because the consequences for the peninsula, the region and indeed the world, should it morph into a war against China, would be horrendous. The current joint military exercises led by the U.S., but with South Korea providing the bulk of the troops, and with contingents from far-flung colonial outposts such as Australia and New Zealand to add a touch of 'the international community,' are exceedingly worrisome. These exercises have been described as 'the biggest in history,' involving nearly as many troops as the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and apart from a computer-simulated drive towards the Chinese border, and amphibious landings in the spirit of Inchon.

For the first time the exercises also incorporate an OPLAN 5015 which includes 'decapitation strikes' against the North Korean leadership and the use of Special Forces to seize key nuclear assets before the South Koreans can get to them. Imagine this: The U.S. launches decapitation and Special Forces strikes alleging that the regime is collapsing and it is forced to act to prevent nuclear weapons from being transferred to terrorists. Most of the media, and allied governments, will not question this fantasy. No doubt the phrase 'humanitarian intervention' will be weaseled in somewhere. North Korea will retaliate as promised and the U.S. will launch the invasion proper, with South Korea troops doing most of the fighting, and filling most of the body bags. This invasion will be purely defensive, of course.

How do we try to explain the hypocrisy, the hysteria and the war-mongering; and in the case of South Korea, self-harm?

A framework for analysis with the U.S. at its core

In order to make sense of this and, lay the foundation for activism, as appropriate, we must contextualize and establish a framework for analysis. The starting point for this framework is that we must look in the right direction. Most writing and discussion on Korean peninsula issues focuses almost exclusively on North Korea. We are told of the North Korean problem, the North Korea threat, how North Korea, or the Kim family, is mad, bad, unpredictable, and so forth. The clue is to look at phrases such as the "Vietnam War," the "Korean War," " invasion of Afghanistan," " invasion of Iraq," and work out what they have in common; or rather what is left out that they have in common. The answer of course is the United States. The U.S. is the common denominator.

No doubt some wise person thousands of years ago pointed out that we will not see the mountain, however high it may be, if we are looking in the wrong direction. And the American mountain is very high indeed. The U.S. is the global colossus. It is the world's major economy (although now overtaken in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms by China) and one relevant consequence of that has been its fondness for economic warfare. Physical sanctions may devastate a target economy without impinging on the far larger American one. The U.S. had an embargo against China for 25 years without American business protesting; mind you they didn't realize what they were missing out on. Sanctions on North Korea have been in place some 70 years, with no apparent protest from American business. The U.S. dominance in international business makes financial sanctions very appealing; again they cause great damage without much cost to the U.S. U.S. economic might means there is plenty of cash to buy friends and influence people. Vicky Nuland's boast, in December 2013, just before the coup in the Ukraine, that they had 'invested' $5 billion in the Ukraine is one example; then there are all the stories of CIA operatives sashaying through Afghanistan and Iraq with dollars, not in fistfuls but in suitcases.

The U.S. is uniquely blessed by nature, with extensive agricultural and mineral resources meaning it cannot be blockaded into submission, however strong a future enemy might be. It is protected by vast oceans east and west and bordered by small, non-threatening countries north and south. Despite this geographical invulnerability, the U.S. spends on its military nearly as much as the rest of the world put together. If one adds to its military budget that of its 'allies' and compares that to the military wherewithal of potential adversaries the disproportion is staggering. At a rough calculation using data from the latest Military Balance assessment from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the military expenditure of U.S. and its 'allies' is about $1 trillion a year. They outspend China seven times, Russia 19 times and North Korea somewhere between 100 times and, if one accepts the estimate of Pyongyang's military budget made by the director of the South Korean Defense Intelligence Agency back in 2013, 1000 times.

The United States also has immense Soft power, as understood by Joseph Nye, which includes diplomatic power and its domination of the global intellectual space which are linked together, the one feeding off the other.

The U.S. has immense diplomatic power. Hence for instance all those dubious UN Security Council resolutions censuring North Korea, and violating the sovereignty of Libya, Yugoslavia, Iraq, or Iran. The U.S. is able to bully, cajole or perhaps just instruct permanent and non-permanent members of the UNSC to commit egregious violations of the UN Charter, damaging its enemies and protecting its friends, such as Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, and of course itself. Again its power is not absolute, but it is extraordinary.

The official U.S. narrative not merely fashions Western media and academia but also much of that in Russia and China. If you look at Russian or Chinese media, in English at least, you will see that unless national interests are directly challenged – in Ukraine and Eastern Europe for the Russians and the South China Sea for the Chinese, the default position is to accept uncritically what the Western news agencies, and hence Western officials, portray. This, needless to say, only works one way. No Western newspaper would ever regurgitate a statement from Tass or Xinhua without inserting it in a political envelope telling the reader not to believe it.

As a result of this domination of the international intellectual space no one seems to blink when the U.S., with its thousand nuclear tests, fulminates against North Korea's four, or with its myriad nuclear and conventional missiles, bombers, fighters, aircraft carriers, and submarines claims that it is being threatened by North Korea with its very limited and uncertain ability to project power far beyond its borders. This goes beyond hypocrisy and double standards into the construction of a special sort of unreality.

Of all countries in the world North Korea alone has been censured by the UNSC for launching satellites, and that on the strange ground that they utilized ballistic missile technology. Strange because not merely, as noted early, are all satellites launched by ballistic rockets, but ballistic missiles are not themselves illegal. How could they be when the U.S. has so many of them?

There are various bilateral and multilateral agreements by which the U.S. attempts to manage the situation – there is, for instance, the limitation it has imposed on South Korean missiles (they don't want Seoul attacking China without permission) but missiles per se are not prohibited Similarly for nuclear tests and weapons. There are various 'voluntary' agreements – the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty – but these are different in nature from, for instance, the prohibition on invading other countries which is enshrined in the United Nations Charter, and dates back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. In this regard the construction of North Korea as an international pariah is an expression of American power rather than, as is usually claimed, a result of the infringement of international law. In fact, the discriminatory charges against

North Korea are themselves a violation of the norms of international law and the equal sovereignty of states.

American power means that nothing much happens in the world without the U.S. being involved although that is frequently hidden. Sometimes it is the dominant actor, sometimes just an endorser, but the U.S. is always there. This does not mean that the U.S. is omnipotent. Indeed something that intrigues me is that clients sometimes have surprising leverage against the U.S. One thinks of Syngman Rhee in the 1950s, or more recent Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan. These are people who were installed by the U.S., had not much popular support and many domestic enemies, but nevertheless at times could disobey orders quite flagrantly. The client/master relationship is constantly being negotiated and is complex. However, if push comes to shove the master prevails, as Rhee found out in 1960.

Deciphering U.S. global strategy

So, in analyzing world affairs the starting point must be the U.S. What does America want? That, needless to say, often bears little connection with what it proclaims as its objective. Analysis must be hard-nosed looking beyond the spin and rhetoric, focusing on actions and seeking real explanations. When we have some idea of America's position we can start looking at the other players, in descending order of importance. For most countries, most of the time, the United States is their major partner-cum-adversary. They tend to tailor their policy in relation to third countries in the light of their relationship with the United States. At the same time we must presume that Washington has a global grand strategy (however incoherent and subject to various factions that may be) and that this strategy prioritizes and subordinates the part to the whole.

The failure to put the U.S. at the core of geopolitical analysis is a fundamental reason why so much writing on the Korean peninsula is usually off mark. We have innumerable websites and NGOs, books and articles focusing on North Korea, often with little attention paid to the U.S., other than considering what effect North Korea, and often 'the North Korean threat' has on America. Looking in the wrong direction, asking the wrong questions, they get misleading or meaningless answers. Associated with this, and arguably a result of it, is the fact that virtually all the experts, all the pundits we hear from, are to use Perry Anderson's term 'state functionaries'. He was talking about American experts on China. Here I am focusing on American experts on Korea, though much the same holds for experts from Britain, Russia, and China. Most of these experts either currently work for the U.S. government or have in the past – in the CIA, Defense, or State usually. If they are former employees they now work for think tanks or NGOs which are, to put it politely, state-aligned. Even academics are constrained by the desire for research funding. There are very few neutral, dispassionate, disinterested (in the proper meaning of the term) voices. One simpler indicator is that virtually all of them express horror at the idea of North Korea having nuclear weapons but few have any qualms about the U.S. and its arsenal. They tend to view the prospect of the U.S. attacking North Korea with moral equanimity.

The Korean peninsula in U.S. strategy

Why is the U.S. interested in the Korean peninsula? The answer is location. Korea is the most valuable piece of geopolitical real estate in the world. It is the nexus where most of the great powers meet and contend. China and Russia share a land border with Korea, Japan is separated by a small sea, and although the Pacific is a large ocean it is also 'the American lake'. None of these powers want a unified Korea subservient to any of the others and since the U.S. is by far the most powerful it has the most-pro-active policy. The U.S. is also different in that it alone, at the moment, has aspirations for global hegemony. This means keeping Japan subservient, and containing China and Russia with the longer term aim of fragmenting them so that they are no longer competitors. It is easy to see how Korea fits in with these strategic objectives. As a physical location it provides bases adjacent to China and Russia and whilst the number of troops permanently deployed in South Korea is small, one of the functions of the joint exercises with the ROK is to practice the rapid influx of massive reinforcements. Japan fulfils the same role.

As an aside it might be noted that Korea also provides a base for keeping an eye on Japan. Whilst the U.S. has been an enthusiastic supporter of Japanese remilitarization, thinking in terms of the containment of China, it is possible this may change. A remilitarized Japan (and it should be remembered that Japan has the expertise to rapidly develop nuclear weapons and delivery systems that might well be superior to China's), made a 'normal' country again, may want to assert its independence from the U.S. As Lord Henry John Temple Palmerston remarked, back in the nineteenth century, countries don't have perpetual friends and enemies, merely perpetual interests.

The Korean peninsula not merely provides the U.S. with physical bases for its military; it provides access to a huge reservoir of Korean military assets. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies report, Military Balance 2015, South Korea has a total troop complement – that is the combination of service personnel and reserves – of about 5.1 million. For comparison this is 2.6 times as much as that of North Korea's 2 million, considerably more than America's 2.2 million and quite a bit more than China's 3.5 million. Because of interoperability, these South Korean troops can fight alongside America, under American command, but probably can't operate on their own in a major war. The Joint military exercises such as Key Resolve, Foal Eagle and Ssang Yong are described as defensive to deter North Korean aggression. Given North Korea's incredible military inferiority against the U.S.-led forces this is obviously a pretext. The exercises practice more than the invasion of the North. The *Chosun Ilbo* which, like Donald Trump sometimes blurts out an inconvenient truth, recently made this comment about the exercises:

The underlying aim is to bring South Korea, Australia, Japan and the U.S. closer together to thwart China's military expansion in the Pacific.

When the United States looks at Korea, it sees China.

So it is clear that for the Unites States the Korean peninsula is hugely important. This is partly in its own right – its 75 million people put it on a par with Germany or France. However its main significance to the U.S. is that it is a strategic asset in its confrontation with China, and to a lesser extent, Russia. If the peninsula could be detached from the Asian mainland, towed down to the South Pacific and parked near New Zealand, then the U.S. would be far less interested. We would not have had the division of Korea, the war, the militarization.

All this means that the U.S.'s North Korea policy, and hence its South Korea policy, must be seen within the context of its struggle with China, and Russia. In 1945 when the U.S. had the peninsula divided its main concern was Russia, then the Soviet Union. At that time it 'owned' China, through Chiang Kai-shek. This changed over time and now China is the major component in its East Asia strategy. However Russia should not be overlooked. The U.S. is a global power, and Russia straddles Europe and Asia, and although it is the European face of Russia which concerns the U.S., it is its Asian side which is most vulnerable; if Russia is struck in East Asia, it bleeds in Europe.

To recap, the U.S.'s Korea strategy is a component of its global strategy, and China is the major focus of that, with Russia coming in behind. North Korea is important because of the role it has in that strategy; it is not really important in itself. So, if for instance, the U.S. decided that good relations with North Korea would better serve its containment of China than the present hostility – by no means a foolish idea – then its Korea policy would change, whatever the screams in Seoul.

U.S. North Korea policy

What, then, is the U.S.'s North Korea policy? Most people, left or right, find that easy to answer. It sees North Korea's nuclear program threatening and its focus is the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. I am not so sure. For one thing U.S. hostility long preceded North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. More important and telling is the fact that there has never been a serious, bipartisan, and sustained attempt to negotiate with Pyongyang on the issue. There was, indeed, the Agreed Framework of 1994 but that was sabotaged by the Republicans while out of the White House, and torn up by them, by George W Bush, when they did hold the presidency. Bush did go through the motions of negotiating for some years, but despite North Korean gestures such as the blowing up the cooling tower of its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon in 2008, these came to naught. Obama, under the rubric of 'strategic patience' has refused to negotiate. To some extent this history can be ascribed to infighting within the power elite, and between government agencies; for instance Treasury's actions against Banca Delta Asia which scuttled the negotiations for some time. American governments are also reluctant to negotiate with adversaries because negotiation implies compromise, thus exposing themselves to charges of being soft and unpatriotic by opponents – Trump, Cruz, Rubio, et al. However, underlying this is a fundamental strategic dilemma.

Some argue that the U.S. could easily negotiate a deal by offering a grand bargain where it guaranteed North Korea's security with perhaps the concession of allowing Pyongyang to retain its present, probably inoperable and certainly tiny, nuclear deterrent. Sig Hecker's 'The Three No's' is an example of this – 'no new weapons, no better weapons, no transfer of nuclear technology.' With Libya in mind, let alone the abrogation of the Agreed Framework, it is difficult to see how the U.S. could offer credible guarantees, even if it wanted to. But it is scarcely likely that it wants to. North Korea's major threat to the U.S. is not its nuclear weapons but its proposal for a peace treaty. If North Korea, by developing a nuclear deterrent, by building a formidable, but primarily defensive, military, by refusing to buckle down under sanctions and having the temerity to launch satellites – if North Korea by doing all this is able to force the U.S. into accepting peaceful coexistence then its example might be followed by others. The one thing empires detest above all else is independence; that and its brother, rebellion. It was for this crime which the Roman Empire reserved crucifixion. North Korea's success would also have implications for China and Russia in their struggle with the U.S.

Having said that, the U.S. would probably negotiate if it were genuinely concerned that North Korea's nuclear weapons presented a serious threat. It seems to me that despite the posturing, they do not. Firstly it is a deterrent, not an offensive weapon, so if North Korea is not attacked then it does not come into play. Barring accidents, the initiative lies with Washington. Secondly, there is no evidence that North Korea can actually deliver a nuclear weapon, certainly not to substantial U.S. territory. This may change; miniaturization may proceed beyond photo opportunities, and an ICBM may someday be tested. Thirdly, the U.S., bolstered by its allies, has overwhelming military superiority. For the moment there is no pressing need to negotiate.

This brings us back to China policy. If the U.S. did negotiate a peace treaty, or if it were able to invade and conquer North Korea and extend Seoul's administration up towards the Yalu (under an American general of course) without provoking a Chinese intervention, what would this do to its China policy? If China did intervene then we would have a second Sino-American war, with all that might entail. But leaving aside that possibility and just considering the implications of a peaceful Korean peninsula we immediately see problems in justifying the U.S. military presence, and missile defenses. How would the U.S. keep South Korea, and to a lesser extent Japan, in line with the containment of China without a North Korean threat? Even today we see lot of anguish in South Korea – I will leave details to my South Korea colleagues – of the impact of THAAD, and other measures, on South Korea's relations with China, and with Russia.

It seems to me that the present situation serves U.S. policy towards China (and towards Russia) very well. Going to war to remove North Korea's nuclear weapons would be perilous, negotiating them away might be even more problematic for U.S. interests, should other small countries follow North Korea's example.

China and Russia – shared predicaments, common strategies

Let us now turn to China, and to Russia. Both are competitors to the Unites States and so both are targets of U.S. global strategy. In addition, both are resurgent states. Russia is recovering from the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Yeltsin years, and China from the 19th century meltdown of the Qing dynasty. Other things being equal, this means that both are getting stronger relative to the U.S., but both are currently very much weaker, Russia of course more than China. But the shift in relative power means that the U.S. has an incentive to go to war earlier rather than later, while for China and Russia the longer they can delay any such clash the better. This in itself does not mean that the U.S. will attack either of them, although there is plenty of conjecture from all quarters on that. However, current weakness combined with the likelihood of greater security in the future does present both China and Russia with a shared predicament – how do they cope with an America in relative decline, which is very strong, has a history of aggressiveness and, the current presidential campaign suggests, may be more adventurist in the future.

This surely is no easy matter. It requires cool and calm judgement in balancing the need to be firm on core issues while giving the United States neither cause nor pretext on more peripheral ones. But what is core and what is peripheral? And where does Korea fit in?

It is often said that the Korean peninsula is the most likely place for conflict between the United States and China (though the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea are also candidates). For Russia it is more likely to be Eastern Europe or Turkey, but a war in Korea would involve Russia to some degree. It is also the place where Russia is most militarily vulnerable. Whilst the U.S. keeps a pretty firm grip on South Korea (it does have wartime control of its military for example) China has little leverage over North Korea and Russia even less. So while the U.S. can ratchet tension up and down as it requires, neither China nor Russia have much control over Korean events; an unenviable strategic position to be in.

However, whilst recognizing the dilemma they face I would argue that they have erred on the side of timidity, even perhaps appeasement, especially in relation to the UN Security Council. They were both complicit in voting for UNSC resolutions censuring North Korea for actions which were quite legal. They have done this on other occasions; Libya comes to mind but they seem to have learnt a lesson from that and have stood firmer on the issue of Syria. UNSC resolutions against North Korea stretch back to 1950, when unfortunately the Soviet Union was absent and not in a position to utilize its veto to defeat the U.S.'s resolution to go to war in Korea, but the modern series date from an attempted satellite launch in 2006. Once having accepted that as a violation of the UN Charter they have been on a slippery slope with no way back.

The word 'appeasement' is often used loosely in order to condemn compromises which are the natural consequence of negotiations between adversaries of some degree of equality. Country A makes a demand of country B. If country B complies will that be the end of the

matter; indeed will A reciprocate with a gesture of good faith? If so, well and good. However, if country A's demands are really stepping stones on the way to an objective – perhaps the enfeeblement or destruction of B – then giving way only whets is appetite.

The problem for China is that America's North Korea policy is really aimed at it, so concession does not solve the problem, but probably exacerbates it. The same, with obvious differences, applies to Russia.

It might be argued that China, and Russia, have followed a Zen strategy of bowing to the wind, which would break a brittle tree, while staying rooted in the soil. They have negotiated a softening of the resolutions and then not implemented them vigorously. I don't think this has been a wise strategy because it means they are constantly on the defensive. North Korea will remain intransigent, because it has no choice, and the U.S. will continue its pressure. I suspect that Putin's response to the U.S.-assisted coup in Ukraine and the U.S.-assisted crisis in Syria offers lessons. Nimble footwork and countermeasures, a judicious amount of military intervention, both in quantity and duration, while at the same time restraining criticism of America with plenty of face-saving gestures.

China, supported by Russia, calls for the resurrection of the Six Party Talks as a solution to the problem. There have been rumors that China cut a deal with the U.S. over the latest resolution for some sort of American promise of talks. Personally I think the Six Party Talks are probably dead, partly because as explained above the U.S. has little interest in negotiating with North Korea but also because the Obama administration realized that Bush had made a strategic mistake in agreeing to them in the first place. Allowing your main competitor to chair and host the major security forum in East Asia while you, and your allies Japan and South Korea, sit on the second tier with North Korea and Russia was not a smart move.

China's contortions, and those of Russia, have been painful to watch. They have condemned North Korea for its violations of the UNSC resolutions forbidding satellite launches and nuclear tests, but they are partly responsible for the resolutions in the first place. They are also partly responsible for the nuclear tests. The United States does provide security and a nuclear umbrella for South Korea. Because it is a master-client relationship it has been able to prevent the South developing nuclear weapons in the past, during Park Chung-Hee's time, and will surely do so in the future. Neither China nor Russia provides real security assurances, or a nuclear umbrella, to North Korea, so they can scarcely be surprised if it attempts to look after itself. To be fair, the United States is far superior in military terms and they perhaps cannot be expected to match America's muscular approach. This leaves China in particular in a vulnerable, defensive position where the initiative is in America's hands. Foreign Minister Wang Yi has recently warned that:

As the largest neighbor of the peninsula, China will not sit by and see a fundamental disruption to stability [there], and will not sit by and see unwarranted damages to China's security interests.

But what does this mean in practice? Is he saying that if the U.S. does invade North Korea, China will intervene? If so, surely it would be wise for China to be more explicit. It should be recalled that in 1950, with no direct communication with the U.S., China conveyed a message through Indian Ambassador K. M. Panikkar that it would intervene if U.S. forces invaded the North and moved towards the Yalu. Washington did not hear, did not listen, or just ignored that warning. The first Sino-American War ensued. Will history repeat itself for a lack of a clear understanding of the consequences of invasion?

If, however, the U S decides that now is the time to give resurgent China a bloody nose, explicit warnings will be irrelevant. Starting the conflict in Korea would give the U.S. signal advantages, not available elsewhere. It would automatically bring in the formidable South Korean military, with the world's largest reservoir of military manpower. It would certainly utilize Japan, whose military budget is 25% higher that South Korea's and who navy is reputedly superior to China's.

Japan – leveraging the Korean situation for remilitarization

Japan's position in all this is relatively straightforward. It has long used the Korean situation, and the perceived 'North Korean threat,' buttressed by a good dose of Japanese colonial racism as a pretext for remilitarization. This has long been supported by the U.S., not in respect of North Korea, where it is scarcely needed except as a place for bases, but as a bulwark against China. Japan's recent eagerness to join in conflict on the Korean peninsula, however, has caused considerable anguish in Seoul. Fighting fellow Koreans under an American general is bad enough, but for South Korea soldiers to fight alongside Japanese troops would be a public relations disaster.

South Korea – the pivot which did not turn

I hesitate to say much about South Korea in this forum but perhaps a few brief remarks, however, ignorant, from a foreign perspective might be tolerated.

I must confess I was wrong about President Park Geun-hye. The North Korea policy of her predecessor, Lee Myung-bak, had been such a disaster that it seemed to me that she would move in some ways to correct things. Lee had increased the danger of war, and his sanctions had damaged the South Korean economy while pushing the North's into the hands of China. Even on his own terms nothing had been achieved.

Whilst Park was less likely than a progressive to want to improve the relationship with the North she has a distinct advantage in being able to do so, if she wishes. Just as Nixon, with

his anti-Communist reputation could go to Beijing and play the 'China card' against the Soviet Union without being accused of being 'soft on Commies' so too could Park, as the daughter of the late anti-Communist dictator, Park Chung Hee, engage with Pyongyang in ways that the more liberal Moon Jae-in could not.

Back in 2011, before the election President Park published an article in Foreign Affairs entitled 'A new kind of Korea: building trust between Seoul and Pyongyang' where she talked about 'Trustpolitik.' That, and the phrase 'peaceful unification' was often on her lips; a notable occasion being her speech in Dresden in 2014. She described unification as a 'bonanza' and described her dream, stolen in fact from Kim Dae-jung, of a Eurasian land bridge through the Koreas and Russia through to Western Europe. The words still live on. Yet her actions have always belied her words.

Obviously, if she had been serious about building trust she would have cancelled the May 24 Sanctions, have built economic and social links between South and North, and have at least attempted to curtail the joint military exercises. She did none of those things. On the contrary, she has now done what Lee couldn't do, and closed down the Kaesong industrial Park, and the current exercises are larger than ever. It is commonly agreed that she has brought inter-Korean relations to a nadir. The Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents were spurious, as I have written elsewhere, but they did provide Lee with an alleged justification for his actions. Nothing comparable has happened during Park's term of office

I leave it to my South Korea colleagues to explain this strange behavior. Is she delusional or is she just lying?

Park Geun-hye aside I still think South Korea remains what I call a 'pivot state'. All the other actors in this drama, from the U.S. through to North Korea, have their lines written for them. The United States is an empire and will do what empires do. It has many options within that characterization but the general thrust is fairly ineluctable. Mao Zedong once said that we shouldn't expect imperialism to put down its butcher's knife and become a Buddha. Conceivably it could, but it won't. North Korea is a vulnerable target sate and will do what it can to defend itself, wisely or unwisely. It has few options and cannot avoid the role it has to play.

South Korea is different. Born as a client state of the U.S. from the ruins of the Japanese empire it now has considerable economic and social strength. It has options. It can make choices. It can, at its most brutal, choose between putting Korea first or serving the U.S. Roh Moo-hyun, in a rather sad exchange with Kim Jong Il at their 2007 summit described how he was attempting to make gradual moves towards autonomy from the U.S. He did not succeed but the challenge is still on the agenda.

Park Geun-hye, under American pressure, has given into Japan over the comfort women issue. That, though galling, is mainly symbolic. More important she has antagonized China,

and Russia, over the proposed deployment of THAAD missiles in South Korea. This in itself is important, but it is also a symbol of a deeper and continuing dilemma. The United States sees South Korea as a pawn in its struggle against China, and Russia. Pawns, as we know, sometimes survive but are often sacrificed.

North Korea – limited options of a target state

Most writers put North Korea first. I've put it last because there is less to say.

Military speaking, as we have seen, North Korea is vulnerable and far inferior to its adversaries who outspend it from a hundred to a thousand times. It has survived sanctions so far – some 70 years and counting – but that is to a large degree due to uncertain and undependable Chinese policy.

There are many things about North Korea policy I find difficult to fathom. I do not understand, for instance, why Kim Jong Un has not worked harder at relations with China and Russia. There may be good, but unknown reasons, why he did not attend the anniversary celebrations in Moscow and Beijing last year. Why, with his overseas education did he not do anything to reform North Korea's notoriously dysfunctional foreign communications/propaganda apparatus? Having lived in Switzerland he must have been aware of how superbly the Americans do these sorts of things. Lack of resources is clearly an issue and frankly however sophisticated and adroit the communications became it would not make much difference to the way that North Korea is portrayed in the mainstream Western media. The Russians run a pretty sophisticated show but that has not stopped the demonization of Putin and the vilification of Russia. But it would help on the margins and would be appreciated by scholars like me and others honestly seeking to comprehend what is going on. Then there are the ridiculously excessive prison sentences imposed on foreigners, most of whom are seemingly mentally unstable or pawns, for petty crimes. There is a long list.

However, I do think the Byungjin policy of a simultaneous development of a nuclear deterrent with economic development is sensible and perhaps inevitable. Let's unpack that a bit.

First of all North Korea is constantly under military threat – the current exercises are just one example – and is subject to continual economic, propaganda, and psychological warfare. Sometimes this is relatively straightforward with physical and financial sanctions. Often these are very petty – here in New Zealand we were prevented by the government from donating laptops to a school in Pyongyang. Recently there have been a couple of stories from Japan, one of a South Korean who was arrested for sending sweets, garments, dishes, spoons and forks to North Korea and then there was the Chinese woman arrested for selling knitwear. Sometimes the warfare is more invidious. Last month there were media stories from Australia of goods for the sports clothing company Rip Curl being made

in Pyongyang by 'slave labor'. Unnerved by the hype, Rip Curl apologized and cancelled the contract. Perhaps the unfortunate textile workers in Pyongyang lost their jobs – which were probably highly prized – just like their compatriots in Kaesong.

There is clearly no easy way for North Korea to counter what it rightly calls the 'hostility policy' of the U.S. but with nuclear weapons. For all their direct and indirect costs, they do make sense. They are cheaper than conventional arms. Moreover, even if it suddenly acquired huge wealth North Korea could never match the conventional military power of the U.S. and its allies. It may be the best option for North Korea in the circumstances, but it does have its drawbacks. 'Best option' of course does not mean that something is desirable, merely that of all of the possible options it is the best choice. This obvious point is often avoided or obscured by people who do not recognize the predicament that North Korea is in; a predicament produced by geographical location, by history and by U.S. global strategy. It was the U.S. that divided the Korean peninsula; it is the U.S. that is hostile to North Korea. This is not a situation that North Korea can avoid, but only seek to cope with.

Being cheaper than conventional weapons means that more resources can be devoted to the economy. There are indications that this is happening. As a corollary, it should be remembered that one function of the military threat, as exemplified by the invasion exercises, is to force North Korea to divert resources from the productive economy into defense.

There are three major disadvantages of the nuclear weapons option.

Firstly the early stage of nuclear weapons requires physical testing. The U.S. no longer needs that, but it already has under its belt those 1000 physical tests in the past that brought it to this position. Unlike, for instance, acquiring an F-35 fighter or an Aegis destroyer nuclear tests are obvious and newsworthy and attract much opprobrium, hypocritical though most of that is. One of the great successes of American propaganda has been to attach to non-proliferation the assumption of peace and disarmament. In fact it has nothing to do with that, it is merely preserving the monopoly of nuclear weapons states. Kenneth Waltz argues that proliferation is peace-enhancing because it provides protection to small states that that they would not otherwise have.

Secondly, nuclear weapons for North Korea can only be used as a deterrent. However unlike the prospect of mutually assured destruction (MAD) of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, North Korea's deterrent is rather like the 'Sampson Option' described by Seymour Hersh in respect of Israel. It is similar to a suicide bomber who kills himself, and in the process some, but not all, of the enemy.

In any case deterrence is a matter of convincing the other side that attacking you would result in intolerable damage to them, and that it is not worth the risk. So it is a matter of

perception rather than reality. You may be bluffing – and bluff is an inherent aspect of deterrence – and your defenses may in reality be weak, but that is irrelevant.

North Korea is often mocked for making extravagant claims about its military capabilities and accused of being crazy for threatening to attack the U.S. That is a misunderstanding of what it is all about. North Korean threats are always essentially conditional. For instance the recent warning by the KPA Supreme Command regarding stories that the U.S. was preparing to launch a 'decapitation' attack:

…….all the powerful strategic and tactical strike means of our revolutionary armed forces will go into pre-emptive and just operation to beat back the enemy forces to the last man **if** there is a slight sign of their special operation forces and equipment moving to carry out the so-called "beheading operation" and "high-density strike."[Emphasis added]

The media often, especially in headings, leaves out the crucial little word 'if' thereby creating the false impression that North Korea is being threatening and bellicose, when in reality it is the other way round. The military exercises, the practicing of decapitation and amphibious landings, and of the invasion of North Korea are surely threatening and belligerent – one can well imagine the uproar in the West if it were Chinese and North Korean forces practicing to invade the South. North Korean statements therefore are not a matter of threat, but of deterrence.

However, the problem for North Korea, and this is the third problem, is that its deterrent in respect of the U.S. is a nuclear one. If the U.S. were not involved and it were merely a matter of deterring the South then North Korea's artillery, which it claims can turn Seoul into a sea of flames, would be sufficient. But it is the U.S. that must be deterred and the only feasible way to do that is to convince them there is a real chance that America itself might be damaged in a counterattack and that means nuclear weapons. In this context bluff is quite reasonable since it is a matter of instilling doubt in the minds of the other side. North Korea almost certainly can't deliver a nuclear warhead on the U.S., but it just might.

The phrase used above -not worth the risk- is relevant here. From the point of view of the U.S. it is a matter of risk-benefit analysis. The amount of risk must be related to the amount of benefit. We might image some megalomaniac strategist sitting in Washington and calculating that it might be worthwhile losing the West Coast if it meant destroying China. With China out of the way the U.S. would have no challengers for generations. The world would be at its feet. It would be a big prize. North Korea is quite a different matter. It is a very small prize and as discussed above removing it through war, or indeed peace, would cause problems for the containment of China.

Moreover a nuclear deterrent is a blunt instrument. For a small country like North Korea, faced by vastly more powerful adversaries, a retaliatory attack has to be all out, no holds barred. No calibrated response, no escalation such as a powerful country might apply to a

weak one – Vietnam comes to mind. But, as noted above, this is the Samson option, resulting in the devastation of North Korea.

This brings us to the word 'pre-emptive.' This was misconstrued by George W. Bush to mean unprovoked. A simple dictionary definition is an action to prevent attack by disabling the enemy. Since Iraq was in no position to attack the U.S., the invasion was clearly not pre-emptive. Pre-emption is normally associated with the action of a weaker person or country faced with what is perceived as an imminent attack by a stronger adversary. This is probably what would happen in a conflict between the U.S. and China, apart from the scenario of China intervening, as in 1950, in response to a U.S. invasion of North Korea. The U.S. would force China into a situation in which it felt it was compelled to make a pre-emptive strike. Being by far the stronger combatant the U.S. would absorb this strike, and then having gained the moral high ground would launch the attack, now a counter-attack, that it had planned; a variant on Pearl Harbor.

Leaving aside the moral deception involved in shifting blame there is the danger that the weaker party might misinterpret the actions of the stronger and launch a pre-emptive strike unnecessarily. This is particularly plausible in the case of North Korea which has very limited surveillance and intelligence capabilities compared with the Americans (North Korea's satellite program is an attempt to remedy this deficiency). The U.S. makes a feint which North Korea interprets as presaging, say, a decapitation strike and launches a pre-emptive and all-out attack. The war, so long desired in certain quarters, comes about.

It might well be argued that for North Korea nuclear deterrence is unwise and might in fact incite the U.S. to attack now, before it is too late. If tomorrow the enemy will be invulnerable, better to attack today. North Korea could say 'if you invade we will unleash a people's war – remember the 1950s, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan.' The problem with that is what might be called the 'Stalingrad factor'. Stalingrad, it has been said, was easier to defend against the Germans when it had been reduced to rubble. But who wants their cities reduced to rubble?

North Korea's nuclear deterrent does also have potential of being able to force the U.S. into some sort of peace agreement in a way that a conventional defense, which by its nature would pose little danger to the U.S., ever could. Whether that might come to pass is another matter but since peace with America must remain North Korea's major foreign policy goal, it will always be on the agenda even if denied.

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A Murderous History of Korea

By Bruce Cumings

More than four decades ago I went to lunch with a diplomatic historian who, like me, was going through Korea-related documents at the National Archives in Washington. He happened to remark that he sometimes wondered whether the Korean Demilitarized Zone might be ground zero for the end of the world. This April, Kim In-ryong, a North Korean diplomat at the UN, warned of 'a dangerous situation in which a thermonuclear war may break out at any moment'. A few days later, President Trump told Reuters that 'we could end up having a major, major conflict with North Korea.' American atmospheric scientists have shown that even a relatively contained nuclear war would throw up enough soot and debris to threaten the global population: 'A regional war between India and Pakistan, for instance, has the potential to dramatically damage Europe, the US and other regions through global ozone loss and climate change.' How is it possible that we have come to this? How does a puffed-up, vainglorious narcissist, whose every other word may well be a lie (that applies to both of them, Trump and Kim Jong-un), come not only to hold the peace of the world in his hands but perhaps the future of the planet? We have arrived at this point because of an inveterate unwillingness on the part of Americans to look history in the face and a laser-like focus on that same history by the leaders of North Korea.

North Korea celebrated the 85th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Army on 25 April, amid round-the-clock television coverage of parades in Pyongyang and enormous global tension. No journalist seemed interested in asking why it was the 85th anniversary when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was only founded in 1948. What was really being celebrated was the beginning of the Korean guerrilla struggle against the Japanese in north-east China, officially dated to 25 April 1932. After Japan annexed Korea in 1910, many Koreans fled across the border, among them the parents of Kim Il-sung, but it wasn't until Japan established its puppet state of Manchukuo in March 1932 that the independence movement turned to armed resistance. Kim and his comrades launched a campaign that lasted 13 difficult years, until Japan finally relinquished control of Korea as part of the 1945 terms of surrender. This is the source of the North Korean leadership's legitimacy in the eyes of its people: they are revolutionary nationalists who resisted their country's colonizer; they resisted

again when a massive onslaught by the US air force during the Korean War razed all their cities, driving the population to live, work and study in subterranean shelters; they have continued to resist the US ever since; and they even resisted the collapse of Western communism – as of this September, the DPRK will have been in existence for as long as the Soviet Union. But it is less a communist country than a garrison state, unlike any the world has seen. Drawn from a population of just 25 million, the North Korean army is the fourth largest in the world, with 1.3 million soldiers – just behind the third largest army, with 1.4 million soldiers, which happens to be the American one. Most of the adult Korean population, men and women, have spent many years in this army: its reserves are limited only by the size of the population.

The story of Kim Il-sung's resistance against the Japanese is surrounded by legend and exaggeration in the North, and general denial in the South. But he was recognizably a hero: he fought for a decade in the harshest winter environment imaginable, with temperatures sometimes falling to 50° below zero. Recent scholarship has shown that Koreans made up the vast majority of guerrillas in Manchukuo, even though many of them were commanded by Chinese officers (Kim was a member of the Chinese Communist Party). Other Korean guerrillas led detachments too – among them Choe Yong-gon, Kim Chaek and Choe Hyon – and when they returned to Pyongyang in 1945 they formed the core of the new regime. Their offspring now constitute a multitudinous elite – the number two man in the government today, Choe Ryong-hae, is Choe Hyon's son.

Kim's reputation was inadvertently enhanced by the Japanese, whose newspapers made a splash of the battle between him and the Korean quislings whom the Japanese employed to track down and kill him, all operating under the command of General Nozoe Shotoku, who ran the Imperial Army's 'Special Kim Division'. In April 1940 Nozoe's forces captured Kim Hye-sun, thought to be Kim's first wife; the Japanese tried in vain to use her to lure Kim out of hiding, and then murdered her. Maeda Takashi headed another Japanese Special Police unit, with many Koreans in it; in March 1940 his forces came under attack from Kim's guerrillas, with both sides suffering heavy casualties. Maeda pursued Kim for nearly two weeks, before stumbling into a trap. Kim threw 250 guerrillas at 150 soldiers in Maeda's unit, killing Maeda, 58 Japanese, 17 others attached to the force, and taking 13 prisoners and large quantities of weapons and ammunition.

In September 1939, when Hitler was invading Poland, the Japanese mobilized what the scholar Dae-Sook Suh has described as a 'massive punitive expedition' consisting of six

battalions of the Japanese Kwantung Army and twenty thousand men of the Manchurian Army and police force in a six-month suppression campaign against the guerrillas led by Kim and Ch'oe Hyon. In September 1940 an even larger force embarked on a counterinsurgency campaign against Chinese and Korean guerrillas: 'The punitive operation was conducted for one year and eight months until the end of March 1941,' Suh writes, 'and the bandits, excluding those led by Kim Il-sung, were completely annihilated. The bandit leaders were shot to death or forced to submit.' A vital figure in the long Japanese counterinsurgency effort was Kishi Nobusuke, who made a name for himself running munitions factories. Labelled a Class A war criminal during the US occupation, Kishi avoided incarceration and became one of the founding fathers of postwar Japan and its longtime ruling organ, the Liberal Democratic Party; he was prime minister twice between 1957 and 1960. The current Japanese prime minister, Abe Shinzo, is Kishi's grandson and reveres him above all other Japanese leaders. Trump was having dinner at Mar-a-Lago with Abe on 11 February when a pointed message arrived mid-meal, courtesy of Pyongyang: it had just successfully tested a new, solid-fuel missile, fired from a mobile launcher. Kim Il-sung and Kishi are meeting again through their grandsons. Eight decades have passed, and the baleful, irreconcilable hostility between North Korea and Japan still hangs in the air.

In the West, treatment of North Korea is one-sided and ahistorical. No one even gets the names straight. During Abe's Florida visit, Trump referred to him as 'Prime Minister Shinzo'. On 29 April, Ana Navarro, a prominent commentator on CNN, said: 'Little boy Un is a maniac.' The demonization of North Korea transcends party lines, drawing on a host of subliminal racist and Orientalist imagery; no one is willing to accept that North Koreans may have valid reasons for not accepting the American definition of reality. Their rejection of the American worldview – generally perceived as indifference, even insolence in the face of overwhelming US power – makes North Korea appear irrational, impossible to control, and therefore fundamentally dangerous.

But if American commentators and politicians are ignorant of Korea's history, they ought at least to be aware of their own. US involvement in Korea began towards the end of the Second World War, when State Department planners feared that Soviet soldiers, who were entering the northern part of the peninsula, would bring with them as many as thirty thousand Korean guerrillas who had been fighting the Japanese in north-east China. They began to consider a full military occupation that would assure America had the strongest voice in postwar Korean affairs. It might be a short occupation or, as a briefing paper put it, it might be one of 'considerable duration'; the main point was that no other power should have a role in Korea such that 'the proportionate strength of the

US' would be reduced to 'a point where its effectiveness would be weakened'. Congress and the American people knew nothing about this. Several of the planners were Japanophiles who had never challenged Japan's colonial claims in Korea and now hoped to reconstruct a peaceable and amenable postwar Japan. They worried that a Soviet occupation of Korea would thwart that goal and harm the postwar security of the Pacific. Following this logic, on the day after Nagasaki was obliterated, John J. McCloy of the War Department asked Dean Rusk and a colleague to go into a spare office and think about how to divide Korea. They chose the 38th parallel, and three weeks later 25,000 American combat troops entered southern Korea to establish a military government.

It lasted three years. To shore up their occupation, the Americans employed every last hireling of the Japanese they could find, including former officers in the Japanese military like Park Chung Hee and Kim Chae-gyu, both of whom graduated from the American military academy in Seoul in 1946. (After a military takeover in 1961 Park became president of South Korea, lasting a decade and a half until his ex-classmate Kim, by then head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, shot him dead over dinner one night.) After the Americans left in 1948 the border area around the 38th parallel was under the command of Kim Sok-won, another ex-officer of the Imperial Army, and it was no surprise that after a series of South Korean incursions into the North, full-scale civil war broke out on 25 June 1950. Inside the South itself – whose leaders felt insecure and conscious of the threat from what they called 'the north wind' – there was an orgy of state violence against anyone who might somehow be associated with the left or with communism. The historian Hun Joon Kim found that at least 300,000 people were detained and executed or simply disappeared by the South Korean government in the first few months after conventional war began. My own work and that of John Merrill indicates that somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 people died as a result of political violence *before* June 1950, at the hands either of the South Korean government or the US occupation forces. In her recent book *Korea's Grievous War*, which combines archival research, records of mass graves and interviews with relatives of the dead and escapees who fled to Osaka, Su-kyoung Hwang documents the mass killings in villages around the southern coast. In short, the Republic of Korea was one of the bloodiest dictatorships of the early Cold War period; many of the perpetrators of the massacres had served the Japanese in their dirty work – and were then put back into power by the Americans.

Americans like to see themselves as mere bystanders in postwar Korean history. It's always described in the passive voice: 'Korea was divided in 1945,' with no mention of the fact that McCloy and Rusk, two of the most influential men in postwar foreign policy, drew their line without consulting anyone. There were two military coups in the

South while the US had operational control of the Korean army, in 1961 and 1980; the Americans stood idly by lest they be accused of interfering in Korean politics. South Korea's stable democracy and vibrant economy from 1988 onwards seem to have overridden any need to acknowledge the previous forty years of history, during which the North could reasonably claim that its own autocracy was necessary to counter military rule in Seoul. It's only in the present context that the North looks at best like a walking anachronism, at worst like a vicious tyranny. For 25 years now the world has been treated to scaremongering about North Korean nuclear weapons, but hardly anyone points out that it was the US that introduced nuclear weapons into the Korean peninsula, in 1958; hundreds were kept there until a worldwide pullback of tactical nukes occurred under George H.W. Bush. But every US administration since 1991 has challenged North Korea with frequent flights of nuclear-capable bombers in South Korean airspace, and any day of the week an Ohio-class submarine could demolish the North in a few hours. Today there are 28,000 US troops stationed in Korea, perpetuating an unwinnable stand-off with the nuclear-capable North. The occupation did indeed turn out to be one of 'considerable duration', but it's also the result of a colossal strategic failure, now entering its eighth decade. It's common for pundits to say that Washington just can't take North Korea seriously, but North Korea has taken its measure more than once. And it doesn't know how to respond.

To hear Trump and his national security team tell it, the current crisis has come about because North Korea is on the verge of developing an ICBM that can hit the American heartland. Most experts think that it will take four or five years to become operational – but really, what difference does it make? North Korea tested its first long-range rocket in 1998, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the DPRK's founding. The first medium-range missile was tested in 1992: it flew several hundred miles down range and banged the target right on the nose. North Korea now has more sophisticated mobile medium-range missiles that use solid fuel, making them hard to locate and easy to fire. Some two hundred million people in Korea and Japan are within range of these missiles, not to mention hundreds of millions of Chinese, not to mention the only US Marine division permanently stationed abroad, in Okinawa. It isn't clear that North Korea can actually fit a nuclear warhead to any of its missiles – but if it happened, and if it was fired in anger, the country would immediately be turned into what Colin Powell memorably called 'a charcoal briquette'.

But then, as General Powell well knew, we had already turned North Korea into a charcoal briquette. The filmmaker Chris Marker visited the country in 1957, four years after US carpet-bombing ended, and wrote: '*Extermination passed over this land*. Who

could count what burned with the houses? … When a country is split in two by an artificial border and irreconcilable propaganda is exercised on each side, it's naive to ask where the war comes from: the border is the war.' Having recognized the primary truth of that war, one still alien to the American telling of it (even though Americans drew the border), he remarked: 'The idea that North Koreans generally have of Americans may be strange, but I must say, having lived in the USA around the end of the Korean War, that nothing can equal the stupidity and sadism of the combat imagery that went into circulation at the time. "*The Reds burn, roast and toast*."'

Since the very beginning, American policy has cycled through a menu of options to try and control the DPRK: sanctions, in place since 1950, with no evidence of positive results; non-recognition, in place since 1948, again with no positive results; regime change, attempted late in 1950 when US forces invaded the North, only to end up in a war with China; and direct talks, the only method that has ever worked, which produced an eight-year freeze – between 1994 and 2002 – on all the North's plutonium facilities, and nearly succeeded in retiring their missiles. On 1 May, Donald Trump told Bloomberg News: 'If it would be appropriate for me to meet with [Kim Jong-un], I would absolutely; I would be honored to do it.' There's no telling whether this was serious, or just another Trump attempt to grab headlines. But whatever else he might be, he is unquestionably a maverick, the first president since 1945 not beholden to the Beltway. Maybe he can sit down with Mr. Kim and save the planet.