



ANALYSIS

Trump, Kim and the
North Korean nuclear
missile melodrama

Euan Graham
May 2018

LOWY INSTITUTE

The Lowy Institute is an independent policy think tank. Its mandate ranges across all the dimensions of international policy debate in Australia – economic, political and strategic – and it is not limited to a particular geographic region. Its two core tasks are to:

- produce distinctive research and fresh policy options for Australia’s international policy and to contribute to the wider international debate.
- promote discussion of Australia’s role in the world by providing an accessible and high-quality forum for discussion of Australian international relations through debates, seminars, lectures, dialogues and conferences.

Lowy Institute Analyses are short papers analysing recent international trends and events and their policy implications.

The views expressed in this paper are entirely the author’s own and not those of the Lowy Institute.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the leaders of the United States and North Korea prepare to meet for the first time, the North Korean nuclear issue sits delicately poised between crisis and breakthrough. Under the Trump presidency, North Korea's scripted brand of hyperbole and brinksmanship is encountering the political theatre of President Donald Trump. Any US president confronted by a direct threat from North Korean nuclear missiles would treat it as a first-order security challenge. Yet Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign, and showmanship, have also elevated North Korea's regional melodrama in ways that potentially advantage Kim Jong-un. Even if it fails to yield any tangible outcomes, meeting a serving US president would still be hugely beneficial to Pyongyang as a means of strengthening Kim's domestic and international position, particularly in respect of its chronic legitimacy deficit in the inter-Korean comparison.

The risk of renewed conflict on the Korean Peninsula has seemingly receded, partly owing to the engagement efforts of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in. However, the very existence of a democratic, prosperous South Korea is key to understanding the North Korean regime's insecurity. Pyongyang also sees its nuclear card as a means of decoupling the United States from its Asian allies, raising questions about what the Trump–Kim summit can realistically achieve on denuclearisation. The risk of a lapse into further crises is extremely high.

On the eve of an unprecedented US–North Korean summit, in Singapore, the North Korean nuclear issue sits poised theatrically between crisis and breakthrough. The inter-Korean summit on 27 April 2018 delivered memorable images of reconciliation, as the leaders of North and South Korea shook hands across the Military Demarcation Line at Panmunjom. This was followed by the dramatic spectacle of three Americans welcomed back on to US soil by President Donald Trump, following their release from detention in North Korea. The risk of renewed conflict on the Korean Peninsula, which has dominated headlines for the past year, has seemingly receded. However, the key questions as to how or whether North Korea will denuclearise have been left wide open for the meeting between Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump.

While North Korea's missile and nuclear programs have existed for decades, the principal driver of recent events has been Pyongyang's rapid progress in rocketry and nuclear testing, in particular the development of an operational intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of directly threatening the United States. Does Kim Jong-un's embrace of diplomatic engagement since the beginning of 2018 signal a fundamental change of strategic direction, or is he simply following a tactical variation on the cyclical 'playbook' inherited from his father and grandfather? Understanding the ongoing competition for legitimacy between the two Koreas is essential to deciphering Pyongyang's behaviour, including its nuclear motivations.

President Trump's election has brought significant disruption to the Korean scene. Trump's showmanlike, bombastic approach to foreign policy in some respects is a mirror held up to Pyongyang. Any sitting US president confronted by a North Korean ICBM would regard it as a first-order security challenge. Yet, in making North Korea his administration's priority international security concern, Donald Trump has elevated North Korea from regional theatre to global prime time. Under the Trump presidency, Kim Jong-un's scripted brand of hyperbole and brinkmanship is meeting a different sort of melodrama in the United States. Beyond mere spectacle, the outcome of a Trump–Kim summit has the potential to redefine Asia's geopolitics. Dramatic as the inter-Korean meeting was, from Pyongyang's perspective it was a curtain-raiser to the main event in Singapore.

This Analysis examines the complex strategic triangle between North and South Korea and the United States. It identifies the key drivers and constraints of Pyongyang's long-time pursuit of nuclear weapons and missiles, including the regime's chronic legitimacy deficit in regard to Seoul. It explains how these inform the distinct phases of the dramatic cycle that defines North Korea's behaviour and the peninsula's highly

...in making North Korea his administration's priority international security concern, Donald Trump has elevated North Korea from regional theatre to global prime time.

theatrical brand of geopolitics. And, ultimately, why North Korea is still unable to come in from the cold.

SETTING THE SCENE: TENSIONS IN THE KOREAN THEATRE

War on the peninsula could trigger the first use of nuclear weapons in anger since the Second World War.

The Korean Peninsula is Asia's great melodrama. The spectacle of two rival, heavily armed Korean states eye-balling each other across the demilitarised zone (DMZ) has held the world's attention as a set-piece flashpoint for seven decades, threatening as no other scenario can to trigger US military intervention on the Asian continent. A second Korean War would likely draw in not just the original belligerents, including China and members of the United Nations Command (Australia included), but also Japan and perhaps Russia. Seoul, we are frequently reminded, could be devastated under a rain of long-range artillery shells and rockets. North Korea is the only country to conduct nuclear tests in the twenty-first century. War on the peninsula could trigger the first use of nuclear weapons in anger since the Second World War.

With around 1.5 million soldiers under arms on both sides of the DMZ, and over 26 000 US military personnel in South Korea, a tense armistice is punctuated by occasional exchanges of fire on land and at sea. Until recently, loudspeakers blasted propaganda and counter-propaganda across the DMZ in a literal manifestation of megaphone diplomacy, but the armistice has largely held. Drones infiltrate memory sticks containing South Korean television dramas, music and outside information into North Korea,¹ while in the opposite direction North Korean defectors occasionally brave it across the minefields and razor-wire defences of the DMZ. In cyberspace — the latest frontier for inter-Korean confrontation and rivalry — there is no such armistice. North of the 38th parallel, Pyongyang has conducted missile launches and nuclear explosions with startling regularity. In 2017 alone, North Korea carried out 23 ballistic missile flight tests, including three ICBM launches and one underground nuclear explosion of unprecedented yield, in all likelihood a thermonuclear device.² Its rapid technical progress towards a nuclear-tipped ICBM has been breathtaking.

Each successive North Korean 'provocation' elicits a South Korean and US counter-response. South Korea's military has been preparing its own rapid-reaction precision missile strikes, part of a dramatically titled "Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation" initiative that includes a newly formed "decapitation unit", aimed at the North Korean leadership.³ The United States has participated in scaled-up exercises with its Korean ally, and flown long-range bombers over the peninsula in increasingly ritualistic demonstrations of assurance and resolve.⁴

South Korea's public has grown inured to such cyclical tensions, having lived in North Korea's shadow for 70 years. However, the Korean melodrama has now moved beyond the confines of the peninsula. Japan

has introduced civil defence drills against missile attack, as real North Korean projectiles fly over the Japanese archipelago.⁵ Even Hawaii has been touched. On 13 January 2018, an emergency text alert sent in error, warning of an incoming missile attack, triggered panic.⁶ The US and Japanese populations are far less used to dealing with North Korean threats. The rapid development of Pyongyang's missile capabilities has brought new 'audiences' within reach. Even Australia has been threatened with "disaster" for supporting US efforts to pressure the regime.⁷

Yet, in spite of Pyongyang's cultivation of a permanent hair-trigger crisis, and the high-alert posture maintained by US and South Korean forces, the flashpoint of a second Korean War has never materialised. Viewed from a longer perspective, the North Korean playbook repeats in cycles of provocation, crisis, engagement, negotiation, and breakdown.⁸ The script developed under North Korea's founding leader, Kim Il-sung (1948–1994), and his son and successor, Kim Jong-il (1994–2011), is essentially unchanging. However, it has played out at a faster pace since Kim Jong-un took power. Two developments in the current cycle have the potential to disrupt the familiar Korean Peninsula melodrama, fundamentally rewriting the script. First, North Korea is on the cusp of acquiring an operational ICBM capability, giving it the ability to deliver nuclear warheads directly to the US mainland as only China and Russia can presently. The second development is the entry of a new actor, US President Donald Trump, more given to hyperbole, bluster, and abrupt reversal than any of the previous external protagonists.

One risk is that Kim Jong-un's self-assured brand of North Korean brinkmanship and President Trump's tempestuous occupancy of the Oval Office will combine to create a rhetorical echo chamber, which threatens to reduce the complex security challenges posed by North Korea's arsenal to a game of nuclear "chicken".⁹ Trump's approach has been compared by former US Assistant Secretary of State and chief nuclear envoy Christopher Hill to trying to "out-North Korean the North Koreans".¹⁰ Throughout 2017, Pyongyang and Washington appeared locked in a dangerous escalatory cycle, with successive North Korean nuclear tests triggering tougher rounds of sanctions and US-led counter-pressure, including calls for preventive military strikes.

Since the beginning of 2018, the crisis dynamic has flipped towards engagement. In February Kim Jong-un sent senior regime representatives to the Winter Olympics in South Korea, and attended an inter-Korean summit in Panmunjom in April. Kim also travelled to Beijing in March for his first overseas visit as North Korea's leader, receiving a ceremonial welcome from President Xi Jinping, despite China billing the visit as "unofficial".¹¹ A second visit to China followed within weeks. This switchover, from reclusive militancy to outreach, should not surprise observers of Pyongyang's past behaviour. It rather marks an intentional transition to the next act of a familiar play. Despite the immediate focus

Viewed from a longer perspective, the North Korean playbook repeats in cycles of provocation, crisis, engagement, negotiation, and breakdown.

on rapprochement with Seoul, drawing the United States into bilateral talks has always been Pyongyang's big prize. More surprising was President Trump's impulsive decision to grant an unprecedented bilateral summit, set to take place in Singapore on 12 June, on largely speculative terms. Indeed, President Trump's role in the North Korea drama is the most unpredictable element.

THEATRICAL STATE

Since the end of the Korean War, North Korea's role has been that of the unlikely, permanently paranoid survivor. Its influence has been mainly limited to the Northeast Asia region. Now, however, Kim Jong-un is playing on a bigger stage, with global reach, for higher stakes than his predecessors. Part of the problem of analysing Pyongyang's intentions is that it does everything it can to play to apocalyptic scenarios, threatening to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire", to sink the Japanese archipelago "with the nuclear bomb of Juche", and to "reduce the US mainland to ashes and darkness".¹²

Such belligerence jars with the clinical lexicon of deterrence, developed during the Cold War in order to remove emotionality from the nuclear equation and to facilitate arms control. As suggested by the strategic doctrine of mutually assured destruction (or MAD, a term coined to reflect the perverse logic behind it), nuclear weapons represent war without limits. Deterrence lies in persuading your opponent that you are crazy enough to use weapons that have no purpose other than mass destruction. This calculated 'irrationality' applies to all nuclear weapons states. However, as a small state, nuclear weapons particularly suit North Korea's maximalist, belligerent strategic culture, which relies on convincing its neighbours, the United States, and as much of the world as possible that any attack against the regime would come at an unacceptable cost, incurring unrestrained retaliation.

[North Korea's] long-term record suggests that the regime is adept at calculating strategic risk.

Over the years, Pyongyang has carried out countless provocations and acts of brinkmanship. North Korea has repeatedly inflicted repeated humiliation and fatalities on the United States, from the 1968 USS *Pueblo* seizure and hostage episode to the 1976 axe killings in the DMZ, which would have elicited military retaliation had they occurred almost anywhere else.¹³ Moreover, North Korea has suffered only limited reprisals from South Korea in recent years despite killing South Korean civilians and military personnel in two incidents in 2010.¹⁴ Kim Jong-un has rapidly accelerated North Korea's nuclear and missile testing. However, the long-term record suggests that the regime is adept at calculating strategic risk.¹⁵

North Korea has successfully deterred the United States from attacking it since the end of the Korean War, even without nuclear weapons. If Pyongyang's original calculation was to field nuclear weapons to compensate for the declining quality of its armed forces, it retains a

conventional deterrent ace up its sleeve: holding Seoul at risk of massed artillery bombardment. This is more of a rusty hammer than a Sword of Damocles, but it still gives US and South Korean commanders serious pause for thought.¹⁶ North Korea might rationally conclude that the conventional destruction of Seoul is not enough to deter the combined power of US and South Korean forces bent on regime change. For a country of such limited means, a 'counter-value' *force de frappe* — composed of road-mobile ballistic missiles with sufficient range and accuracy to hit population centres and large US bases in South Korea and Japan — should be enough to keep the Americans at bay. Another factor in Pyongyang's favour is sharing a 1400-kilometre border with China. Existing next to China, as a treaty ally, adds enormously to North Korea's deterrence, however estranged the Pyongyang–Beijing relationship. North Korea's skill in learning how to manoeuvre within China's strategic shadow, even against Beijing's own security interests, is one of the major factors behind its survival, and why it is such a frustrating interlocutor, for all the major parties.

Existing next to China, as a treaty ally, adds enormously to North Korea's deterrence, however estranged the Pyongyang–Beijing relationship.

The threat that North Korea's nuclear ambitions pose is Pyongyang's only significant source of international attention and leverage. This in part explains the logic of acquiring a nuclear arsenal. However, by developing thermonuclear weapons that can be delivered *globally* by ICBMs, North Korea is not merely seeking to join the *de facto* nuclear states of India, Pakistan, and Israel. It is vaulting directly into the inner sanctum of the nuclear club, joining the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The trade-off of becoming a global nuclear power is that with such apocalyptic capability comes responsibility and restraint. The question is not if North Korea's leaders are rational — every regime wants to survive — but whether their underlying objectives are compatible with peacefully preserving the status quo. Will the risk of direct nuclear escalation with the United States force Pyongyang to adopt a more responsible approach towards crisis stability and deterrence than it has in the past? Or will it embolden the regime, under cover of its own nuclear umbrella and 'escalation dominance', to pursue a revisionist agenda, poke holes in the fabric of US extended nuclear deterrence in Northeast Asia, and engage in nuclear blackmail on a global scale?¹⁷

Understanding theatricality is important for decoding North Korea's intentions.¹⁸ Nobody does brinksmanship, belligerence or bombast to the same degree. Pyongyang frequently 'owns the stage' because it sticks to variations on its tried-and-tested script.¹⁹ Kim Jong-un is young, but North Korea's lead nuclear negotiators, such as Kim Kye Gwan, have amassed decades of experience and are steeped in brinksmanship.²⁰ Anyone who has visited Panmunjom in the DMZ will recognise the ritualistic aspect of North–South rivalry: geopolitical tension as grand spectacle. For all the real-life drama that plays out at Panmunjom, including a dramatic defection and armed pursuit in November 2017, it is one of the Korean Peninsula's most popular tourist sites — for both

North and South.²¹ It is also important to recognise South Korea's more benign but active contribution to the melodramatic dynamic of inter-Korean relations, as demonstrated at the recent Winter Olympics and the selection of Panmunjom as the location for the third inter-Korean summit.²²

THE LEGITIMACY TRAP

The division of the Korean Peninsula is vital to understanding North Korea's underlying security dilemma. Although North and South Korea were jointly admitted into the United Nations in 1991, Seoul retains a constitutional claim on the territory of the whole peninsula. This poses an existential threat to the North Korean regime because it long ago lost its battle for legitimacy with a more successful, democratic, and prosperous South Korea. In common with all totalitarian regimes, Pyongyang needs to sustain an atmosphere of permanent crisis in order to justify its social and economic controls. Maintaining a siege narrative requires a posture of constant vigilance against real or imagined enemies. However, North Korea's acute sensitivity to inter-Korean comparisons requires an extra level of control, including a blockade on information from the outside.²³

At a more overt level to the legitimacy question, the perception of external threat from a US-led military intervention or regime change, dominates North Korea's official discourse.²⁴ This runs deep in the regime's thinking and identity. Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho announced in his 2017 UN General Assembly address that North Korea's "national nuclear force is, to all intents and purposes, a war deterrent for putting an end to [sic] nuclear threat of the US and for preventing its military invasion".²⁵ However, such a perception of US hostility is ultimately secondary compared to the primary threat of absorption by the South. This seems counterintuitive, particularly at a time when the Moon Jae-in administration in Seoul is pursuing a pro-engagement policy, promising economic support and emphasising peaceful coexistence over accelerated unification.²⁶ This is even more the case when the option of military strikes has been explicitly kept on the table by the Trump administration.²⁷

*...the regime's
fundamental security
concern is that ordinary
North Koreans... will vote
with their feet and move
south, triggering the
collapse of the state.*

Nonetheless, the regime's fundamental security concern is that ordinary North Koreans, once given the freedom of information and movement to choose which Korea to live in, will vote with their feet and move south, triggering the collapse of the state. Such logic applies even with a progressive, pro-engagement incumbent in the Blue House. This poses a more insidious threat in Pyongyang's calculation than a confrontational South Korea. Inter-Korean engagement projects overseen by South Korea's Ministry of Unification are regarded with extreme wariness by North Korea, because of their potential for stimulating the kind of ground-level interpersonal links and social interactions that it fears most. In spite of Moon's desire to revive inter-Korean cooperation, an ambition clearly evident in the recent Panmunjom Declaration agreed by Seoul and

Pyongyang,²⁸ Kim Jong-un has not committed to reactivating any of the South Korean-funded cross-border projects initiated by his father, all of which were summarily shut down and subsequently asset-stripped.²⁹ At Panmunjom, Kim “agreed to adopt practical steps towards the connection and modernisation” of transport links across the 38th parallel, but no more. As long as the two Koreas remain in competition for the legitimacy of a single, reunified Korean state, peaceful coexistence on level terms is a risk that North Korea’s current leadership cannot afford. Pyongyang’s carefully choreographed ‘charm offensive’, starting with its participation in the recent Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and continuing with Kim’s confident performance at the Panmunjom summit, has done nothing to fundamentally reverse this dynamic. It has only reconfirmed it.

North Korea’s unfavourable natural resource allocation means it has to rely substantially on imports of food and fuel. Economic self-reliance, expressed in the North’s founding ideology of *juche*³⁰ under Kim Il-sung, was a fiction in practical terms. Even in its most successful years, Pyongyang relied heavily on external subsidies, chiefly from the Soviet Union and China (just as South Korea relied on direct and indirect economic support from the United States). Of course North Korea’s impoverished condition is less the result of resource constraints, or sanctions, than it is a product of internal dysfunction. Despite leading South Korea across many development indicators until the 1970s, North Korea stagnated thereafter, while the South boomed. The weak foundations of Pyongyang’s planned economy were brutally exposed at the end of the Cold War, when Soviet subsidies were withdrawn overnight.³¹ Compounding the economic collapse and famine that followed, the regime continued to allocate scarce resources to fund military programs and to secure the loyalties of the elite. Sanctions levelled by the United States and its allies in response to Pyongyang’s missile and nuclear activities since the 1990s have imposed economic costs. They have also provided a useful means of explaining privations ordinary North Koreans have had to endure ever since the command economy collapsed in the mid-1990s, ushering in what the regime euphemistically terms the “arduous march”.³² Perversely, sanctions play a central role in helping to justify Pyongyang’s internal siege narrative and information blockade.

Confronted by this legitimacy deficit and with no hope of catching up with South Korea’s level of economic development — the South’s GDP per capita is more than 20 times that of the North³³ — Pyongyang cannot relax its information blockade, even as illicit South Korean cultural products spread in the North.³⁴ That is because it serves primarily as a bulwark against incorporation by the more successful Korean state. Information is the weapon that North Korea’s rulers fear most.

This threat to regime security applies regardless of whether the government of the day in Seoul seeks accelerated unification. Nor is it fundamentally affected by the increasing ambivalence of young South

Confronted by this legitimacy deficit... Pyongyang cannot relax its information blockade, even as illicit South Korean cultural products spread in the North.

...giving up on unification is a step too far, politically, for any South Korean leader to contemplate...

Koreans towards their compatriots in the north, or their unease about the financial burdens of unification.³⁵ A democratic, prosperous, and open South Korea threatens the North Korean regime simply by virtue of its existence. This organic tension in the inter-Korean relationship explains why Pyongyang treats Seoul with such circumspection, and why South Korea wields only limited influence over North Korea, notwithstanding its earnest efforts to promote inter-Korean engagement.³⁶

Short of a miraculous revival of North Korea's economic fortunes, the only move that could temper this existential threat to Pyongyang would be for Seoul to renounce its claims upon North Korea and support security guarantees as part of a US-backed peace treaty.³⁷ However, giving up on unification is a step too far, politically, for any South Korean leader to contemplate, at least publicly.³⁸ Even this would probably be insufficient to entice Pyongyang to step in from the cold. It is essential to appreciate the regime's underlying fragility, in view of North Korea's growing confidence under Kim Jong-un, and clear articulation of a racially defined brand of nationalism.³⁹ Unlike socialist bloc countries that have embraced reforms, such as Vietnam and Myanmar, the immovable obstacle to reform in North Korea is unification and the threat that South Korea poses to the legitimacy of Pyongyang's ruling elite.

Non-Korean observers talk increasingly of a permanent division as integral to a security solution on the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁰ However, who is to say that North Korea is willing to give up on its own unification claims, as the price for a final peace on the peninsula? Kim Jong-un has given no indication of moderating his ambitions. It would be foolish to dismiss 'unification on North Korea's terms' as empty rhetoric.⁴¹ Indeed, the North cannot jettison unification, because in its narrative the division of the peninsula is entirely attributable to foreign interference. Yet, it is difficult to imagine the circumstances under which it might occur, peacefully or by force. The vast majority of South Koreans feel no attraction to North Korea as an alternative model. Most would be insulted by the comparison. Militarily, a North Korean conventional invasion would be doomed to crushing failure, unless supported by China in an unlikely reprise of the Korean War. North Korea's weakness in the inter-Korean comparison remains chronic across every power metric. As is clear from the Lowy Institute's Asian Power Index, in which North Korea ranks 17th out of 25 countries, the stand-alone exception is ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.⁴² Kim Jong-un is intent on maximising his one comparative advantage in the international system.

PLAYING THE NUCLEAR ACE

North Korea has gone to extraordinary lengths to develop a survivable intercontinental nuclear missile force. Deterrence is the obvious baseline motivation. Even after the execution of Saddam Hussein in late 2006, Western governments hoped that North Korea might follow Libya's Muammar Gaddafi by voluntarily relinquishing its nuclear ambitions.

Gaddafi's gruesome death at the hands of rebel forces would have registered, coming just a few weeks before Kim Jong-un took over as North Korea's leader, in late 2011.⁴³ North Korea was already much closer to attaining a nuclear capability than Libya or Iraq. Two nuclear weapons tests were conducted under Kim Jong-il, in 2006 and 2009. If not irrevocably committed to the nuclear weapons path, North Korea was already at the garden gate. Nevertheless, the prevailing assumption in the West remained that Pyongyang still treated its undeclared nuclear ace as part deterrent, part bargaining chip.⁴⁴

This was widely accepted as the paradigm undergirding North Korea's approach to nuclear development, dating back to the first nuclear crisis of 1993–94. That crisis was eventually resolved when the 1994 Agreed Framework was adopted, shuttering the North's plutonium-fuelled reactor at Yongbyon and freezing Pyongyang's nuclear activities under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision, in return for supplies of heavy fuel oil and promises to build proliferation-resistant nuclear reactors.⁴⁵ The significance of the Agreed Framework as a diplomatic breakthrough in US–North Korea relations, culminating in the October 2000 visit to Pyongyang by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, is largely forgotten in the United States. The agreement fell apart following US revelations in 2002 that North Korea was operating a secret uranium-enrichment program.⁴⁶ While some have disputed whether North Korea technically infringed the Agreed Framework,⁴⁷ that the regime invested in a clandestine uranium enrichment program suggests it was never committed to the goal of denuclearisation. As a result, cheating is widely assumed to be a given of entering into non-proliferation agreements with Pyongyang.⁴⁸ Proponents maintain that in exchange for the right mix of material inducements, North Korea's weapons development would have been substantially *slowed*, if never completely halted, considerably delaying the day when its nuclear aims would move out into the open.

Proponents maintain that in exchange for the right mix of material inducements, North Korea's weapons development would have been substantially slowed...

Kim Jong-un began to ramp up the missile and nuclear development programs he inherited from his father shortly after taking the reins in December 2011. The inflection point came in 2012, with the decision to constitutionally enshrine North Korea's status as a "nuclear state and an unchallengeable military power".⁴⁹ By committing his prestige at such an early stage, Kim Jong-un was effectively hitching his leadership to the overt acquisition of nuclear weapons, and the missiles to deliver them. With the weight of the Kim dynasty legacy officially behind it, North Korea's nuclear deterrent was henceforth irreversible, in North Korean terms. At a December 2017 ceremony, bestowing awards on the scientists behind North Korea's apparently successful ICBM design, the Hwasong-15, Kim Jong-un committed to further "bolster up the nuclear force in quality and quantity".⁵⁰ Subsequent North Korean statements have repeated claims to be a nuclear weapon state.

Kim's highly personalised association with the nuclear and missile program needs to be seen not only as a response to external threats but

*In contrast to his father's austere watchword *songun* ("military first"), Kim's ideological slogan is *byungjin*... "economic and military progress together".*

grounded in North Korea's domestic politics. With every successful launch, many directly observed by the young leader, North Korea's missiles and rockets have metaphorically borne Kim Jong-un aloft. In contrast to his father's austere watchword *songun* ("military first"), Kim's ideological slogan is *byungjin*, which translates loosely as "economic and military progress together". He seems to be promising North Koreans that he will have his nuclear cake but they can have a slice of economic development too. Indeed, he has presided over a period of relatively healthy economic growth by North Korean standards.⁵¹ However, all policy in North Korea remains subordinate to regime security. The limited marketisation trend is merely a means to that end. Kim's primary pathway to national and international legitimacy runs through the nuclear route.

After a patchy start and some programmatic failures, such as the Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missile,⁵² North Korea's extraordinary progress on missiles and nuclear weapons under Kim Jong-un raises questions about how an impoverished country, subject to one of the most comprehensive and targeted sanctions regimes in history, as well as covert disruption efforts, has been able to achieve such exponential advances, without outside assistance.⁵³ The US intelligence community has long operated on the assumption that the strategic goal of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs is to field an ICBM capability.⁵⁴ Pyongyang's sprint to the nuclear finishing line, significantly foreshortening the anticipated time frame, ranks as a significant achievement in tactical surprise, if not an outright intelligence failure for the West.⁵⁵

The debut of the Hwasong-15 ICBM, test-fired from a road-mobile launcher on 29 November 2017, is of particular note. The missile's estimated payload is of sufficient size to obviate questions about North Korea's progress on warhead miniaturisation.⁵⁶ Although it is liquid-fuelled, and therefore more vulnerable to attack in the launch-preparation phase than solid-fuelled missiles, pre-emption would be very difficult for the United States and South Korea if the missile was deployed in numbers.

Questions remain about whether North Korea has successfully tested a heat shield capable of withstanding the stresses of atmospheric re-entry, which is critical for delivering warheads to their targets. Ultimately, purists will maintain that North Korea has not entered the intercontinental club until it has successfully conducted a full-range flight test on a ballistic trajectory, something that Ri Yong Ho has said his country "may" do in the Pacific Ocean.⁵⁷ Even the North Koreans are unlikely to know their true capability because of the practical difficulty of gathering reliable data on missile re-entry and impact far beyond North Korea's territory. However, recent missile tests have taken on an increasingly "operational" character. For example, in March 2017, North Korea conducted a salvo roadside launch of extended-range Scud missiles on a bearing for Iwakuni, Japan — near Hiroshima — suggestive of a

practice drill for a (potentially nuclear) attack on the US Marine Corps Air Station located there.⁵⁸

South Korean and US intelligence assessments still appear to err on the side of caution. In January 2018, former CIA Director Mike Pompeo commented that North Korea was a “handful of months” away from the capability to “hold America at risk”. Although it is not clear precisely how the United States defines that technical threshold, Pompeo referred to the regime’s “capacity to deliver from multiple firings of these missiles simultaneously”.⁵⁹

North Korea’s intensive missile and nuclear development during 2017 demonstrates the overall technical maturity of its programs, and its resilience to sanctions and other disruption efforts on the part of the United States and its allies. As noted by the prominent North Korean defector and former diplomat Thae Yong Ho, 2017 was likely identified by the regime as a political window of opportunity, framed by the advent of new administrations in Seoul and Washington.⁶⁰ Thae accurately predicted that North Korea would seek to consolidate its missile and nuclear capability as far as possible, before announcing the completion of its deterrent.⁶¹ This duly transpired with a late November declaration, attributed to Kim Jong-un, that North Korea had “finally realised the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force”.⁶²

...2017 was likely identified by the regime as a political window of opportunity, framed by the advent of new administrations in Seoul and Washington.

North Korea has yet to cross the Rubicon of operationally fielding the Hwasong-15 as its frontline ICBM. A single ‘lofted trajectory’ flight test would be a risky basis from which to put the missile into serial production. Further tests are therefore likely, unless Kim decides to put the Hwasong-15 on the table for negotiation with the United States following North Korea’s announcement in April of a nuclear and long-range missile testing moratorium.⁶³ Even the field deployment of an ICBM force would not necessarily signal the end of North Korea’s missile testing program. The next phase is likely to focus on submarine-launched, solid-fuelled missiles known to be under development.⁶⁴ What is most remarkable about North Korea’s missile ambitions is the variety and complexity of systems involved, providing a cushion against the failure of individual designs, and potential collateral in future negotiations.⁶⁵ Moreover, the absence of flight testing does not mean North Korea’s missile program stands still. The battery of tests conducted in 2017 will have yielded a mass of data to further improve North Korea’s existing designs. Pyongyang’s decision, announced in late April 2018, to close its nuclear test site and declare a halt to “test launches of mid- and long-range missiles or ICBMs” should be seen as a gesture born of confidence in the baseline technical maturity of these programs.⁶⁶

True to form, North Korea has most likely concluded that pausing at the brink of an operational ICBM capability maximises its potential negotiating position with the United States. Seen from this vantage point,

the current period of diplomatic outreach is akin to testing the market at peak value.

BEYOND DETERRENCE

By holding the US heartland at direct risk of nuclear attack, Kim Jong-un may be seeking to do two things, beyond deterring the United States from attack.

First, by drawing the United States into some form of arms control negotiation — assuming the Trump administration will moderate its current insistence on complete, irreversible, verifiable disarmament — Kim aims to establish North Korea as a nuclear peer of the United States. There were firm indications of this in Ri Yong Ho's reference in September 2017 to achieving a "balance of power" with the United States. Pyongyang is most unlikely to win formal recognition as a nuclear weapons state. However, Ri also said that, "We do not need anyone's recognition of our status as a nuclear weapon state and our capability of nuclear strike".⁶⁷ This is a clear signal that Pyongyang understands *de jure* recognition is not achievable, nor something it seeks for status. Even if it fails to yield any tangible outcomes, a meeting between Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump would still be hugely beneficial to Pyongyang as a means of strengthening Kim's domestic and international position, particularly in respect of its chronic legitimacy deficit in the inter-Korean comparison.

Second, North Korea's ICBM program is likely to further an ambitious strategic aim of "decoupling" the US–South Korea alliance.⁶⁸ By holding the United States at direct risk of nuclear attack, in sufficient numbers to overwhelm America's missile defences, an ICBM capability empowers Pyongyang to make coercive threats against the United States. This would have the effect of undermining the credibility of US security guarantees to South Korea and Japan, and the broader framework of extended nuclear deterrence, on which Australia also relies.

...Pyongyang's rapid advances in nuclear weaponry have brought the debate over independent nuclear armament from the political fringes into the political mainstream

South Korea, which abandoned a covert nuclear program in the late 1970s under heavy US pressure, is most susceptible to decoupling.⁶⁹ The United States continues to offer nuclear assurances to its Northeast Asian allies on an ongoing basis. However, Pyongyang's rapid advances in nuclear weaponry have brought the debate over independent nuclear armament from the political fringes into the political mainstream.⁷⁰ Pyongyang has perennially sought to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington, with the ultimate aim of expelling US forces, or at least shrinking the US strategic footprint on the peninsula.⁷¹ This is an important shared realpolitik interest between China and North Korea. Hence Beijing's repeated advocacy for a "freeze-for-freeze" proposal, whereby the United States would halt regular joint exercises with South Korea in exchange for a North Korean moratorium on further missile and nuclear testing.⁷²

Former presidential adviser Steve Bannon is among those known to be sceptical about the long-term value of maintaining US forces on the Korean Peninsula. When still in the White House, Bannon was reportedly in favour of a “grand bargain” that would see US forces exit South Korea in return for a freeze on the North’s nuclear program.⁷³ Awareness of such influences on the Trump White House encourages Pyongyang to play on decoupling fears, in the hope that Washington will eventually conclude the costs of maintaining its alliance with Seoul outweigh the security benefits. President Trump, well known to be sceptical about US alliances, is reported to have tasked the Pentagon, earlier in 2018, to draw up options for cutting back US forces in South Korea.⁷⁴ Secretary of Defense James Mattis has since clarified that the US military presence in the South would not be tabled for negotiation with Pyongyang, at least not initially.⁷⁵ Yet when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says the purpose of a Trump–Kim summit is “to address the threat to the United States”, US allies in Northeast Asia naturally become concerned that their security interests are at risk of being overlooked in an “America First” grand bargain.⁷⁶ The prospect of lasting damage done to America’s alliances in Asia maintains North Korea’s usefulness as a net asset in Beijing’s eyes.

...[when] Pompeo says the purpose of a Trump–Kim summit is “to address the threat to the United States”, US allies in Northeast Asia naturally become concerned that their security interests are at risk of being overlooked...

ENTER TRUMP

Much of the purpose behind North Korea’s ‘noisy’ behaviour is about getting the United States to pay more attention to it. The cyclical nature of North Korea’s conduct corresponds, in part, to the learning curve of US administrations, which appear condemned to repeat some of the errors of their predecessors as well as make fresh ones of their own.

Since the Cold War, US strategic attention has been centred on the Middle East. Periodically, America’s focus falls squarely on the Korean Peninsula, as was the case in Bill Clinton’s first term, and initially under George W Bush when North Korea was branded as part of an “axis of evil”. In both cases, the trigger was North Korea’s transgression of a US nuclear proliferation ‘red line’; reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in 1993 and secretly enriching uranium in 2002. This precipitated a spike in tensions and, in the earlier case, substantive military preparations. Still, in both episodes North Korea’s brinkmanship led to dialogue and Washington’s strategic gaze eventually shifted. The second Obama administration ultimately settled on a policy of “strategic patience”, to deliberately deny North Korea attention. This was only after the collapse of a “Leap Day” agreement in 2012, however, in which US food aid was set to be provided to North Korea in return for a moratorium on missile testing.⁷⁷

The script for North Korea’s relations with the United States has varied with each passing presidential administration, but none has proved able to grapple with the nuclear issue. Deterrence has been maintained. However, Pyongyang has exposed successive US nuclear red lines as

hollow. Trump has a point when he says that his administration inherited the accumulated failure of its predecessors to prevent North Korea from reaching the threshold of an operational ICBM capability.⁷⁸ Permitting Pyongyang to join the ranks of de facto nuclear superpowers would be anathema for any US administration.

Under its “maximum pressure” campaign, the Trump administration has ratcheted up sanctions to an unparalleled degree, including through the use of unilateral, secondary penalties on Chinese and Russian entities engaging in business with North Korea.⁷⁹ Yet Trump has differed most starkly from his predecessors in terms of rhetoric.

The administration’s approach towards North Korea at the rhetorical level has been characterised by inconsistency, sometimes incoherence. The president’s utterances on North Korea reflect binary impulses. On the one hand there is “fire and fury” and promises to “totally destroy” North Korea with “locked and loaded” military responses if the United States or its allies are attacked.⁸⁰ Kim Jong-un has been disparagingly referred to as a “maniac” or “little rocket man”. Some of this is obvious bluster. On the other hand there are the president’s assertions that he would be “honoured” to meet, and that he would “probably” have a “very good relationship” with, the North Korean leader.⁸¹ While these sentiments appear jarringly inconsistent, they boil down to a dual-track approach of sustaining pressure on the regime, while keeping the door open to a potential deal.

The administration’s approach towards North Korea at the rhetorical level has been characterised by inconsistency...

This duality has extended across the administration. Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson mooted talks “at the appropriate time, under the right circumstances”, only to be undercut by statements from the US commander in chief that “he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man”.⁸² The fulsome support now offered by Tillerson’s successor, Mike Pompeo, for the upcoming Singapore summit underlines the administration’s changeability, although Pompeo has downplayed expectations for a “comprehensive agreement” from a first meeting between the two leaders.⁸³

Hard-line voices openly arguing for regime change and “preventive” military force have mainly been outside the Trump administration. John Bolton’s appointment as National Security Advisor augurs for a muscular approach to counter-proliferation given his well-advertised views on the use of force and North Korea.⁸⁴ That said, Bolton’s predecessor, National Security Advisor HR McMaster, was himself widely regarded as sceptical about the possibility for deterring a nuclear North Korea, and in favour of a more coercive approach.⁸⁵

It is far from clear that this amounts to a concerted strategy. Even allowing for some deliberate ‘good cop, bad cop’ mixed messaging, the overall impression of incoherence in the administration’s policy is best summed up by Vice President Mike Pence’s formulation on his way

home from the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics: “maximum pressure and engagement at the same time”.⁸⁶

Without the requisite expertise normally available to a Republican administration, the Trump administration is at a particular disadvantage.⁸⁷ Many Asia experts signed letters during the election campaign pledging never to work with Trump. The expertise deficit has been compounded by the rejection of former Director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, Victor Cha, as a candidate to fill the long-vacant US ambassadorship in Seoul, and the abrupt resignation of the State Department’s North Korea envoy, Ambassador Joseph Yun.⁸⁸ Admiral Harry Harris’ eleventh-hour ambassadorial re-tasking, from Canberra to Seoul, suggests the administration belatedly recognises that South Korea requires more high-level US attention.

North Korea is a conspicuous fit for the Trump administration’s “America First” foreign policy template, defined by its “outlaw actions and reckless rhetoric” as a “rogue regime”,⁸⁹ bent on developing “the capability to kill millions of Americans with nuclear weapons”.⁹⁰ The Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats, has described North Korea’s serious, but still limited, missile threat as “existential”.⁹¹ The prospect of North Korean nuclear-tipped missiles aimed at major US cities lends itself to clear communication to the American public.⁹² Meanwhile, Pyongyang’s official media has played along to an image of pastiche villainy, publishing anti-US invective, explicitly referring to New York as a potential target, and broadcasting launch-site photographs of a beaming dictator flanked by chortling henchmen. More than Russia, China, or Iran, North Korea has no qualms about being a poster child adversary, as long as Washington treats it seriously.

Initially, at least, there were fears that Trump and Kim could rhetorically box themselves into armed confrontation. Trump’s promise in his 2018 State of the Union address to make the US nuclear arsenal “so strong and powerful that it will deter any acts of aggression” would not look out of place in a speech by Kim Jong-un.⁹³ Both leaders see nuclear weapons as central to national security, as the ultimate guarantee against threats to the homeland. From the North Koreans’ perspective, the Trump administration has also brought the oxygen of publicity, giving their nuclear ambitions unprecedented prominence. Maximum attention, in the international media, has been the corollary of the US “maximum pressure” campaign.

Despite Pyongyang’s switch-over from confrontation to diplomatic outreach, there is still a risk that sustained tensions between the United States and North Korea, fanned in part by the president’s confrontational rhetoric, will condition US public opinion into accepting that armed conflict is inevitable, if the anticipated Trump–Kim summit fails to yield acceptable North Korean concessions. Unsurprisingly, US public opinion polls show a marked step up in threat perception towards North Korea

...the Trump administration has also brought the oxygen of publicity, giving [North Korea’s] nuclear ambitions unprecedented prominence.

According to Gallup, a plurality of Americans favour “taking military action against North Korea if economic and diplomatic efforts fail to achieve the United States’ goals”.

over the past year.⁹⁴ According to Gallup, a plurality of Americans favour “taking military action against North Korea if economic and diplomatic efforts fail to achieve the United States’ goals”.⁹⁵

Another risk is that the more cautious elements in the Trump administration, chiefly represented by Secretary of Defense James Mattis, conclude that broader questions of alliance credibility would eventually compel the United States to follow through “kinetically” on the commander-in-chief’s bluster. Persistent talk throughout 2017 of US preventive strikes and inflicting a “bloody nose” suggests there is more to this than a simple bluff.⁹⁶

However, on balance, the United States is unlikely to initiate a military attack. The prospect of airstrikes reliably destroying or substantially degrading North Korea’s nuclear and missile arsenal before it can retaliate is increasingly questionable. Escalating conflict could turn nuclear and bring in China. The consequences of a US-initiated conflict, even if operationally successful, could ultimately prove more damaging to US standing among its allies than inaction. Unfortunately for Washington, US credibility suffers either way.⁹⁷ This unenviable dilemma is primarily the result of North Korea’s breakthrough ICBM capability. Blame for US policy failure needs to be apportioned over the lifespan of North Korea’s decades-old nuclear program.

Finally, the direct financial costs of a US military campaign to destroy North Korea’s nuclear capabilities would have to be borne through deficit financing. The resulting blowout in US debt would be unpalatable for President Trump, who operates on cost-benefit calculations. While there are fears that US domestic politics could ‘wag the dog’ of military confrontation against North Korea, US public opinion is more likely to constrain foreign policy adventurism since Trump was elected on a platform of disentangling the United States from foreign wars of choice, not initiating them. The administration’s limited use of force against the Syrian regime suggests that underlying caution prevails.

From a broader strategic standpoint, Seoul, as Washington’s treaty ally, needs to be integrally involved in US policy towards the North. Mired in its own domestic political melodrama during the impeachment of Park Geun-hye, South Korea was initially disadvantaged by having an acting president during Trump’s first months in office, and subsequently by the election of a leftist, pro-engagement leader, Moon Jae-in. Seoul’s sense of neglect has been compounded by the delay in appointing a US ambassador and the Trump administration’s hostility towards the bilateral Korea–US free trade deal, negotiated under President Obama.⁹⁸ Trump’s visit to South Korea in November 2017, including a prominent defence of the alliance in his National Assembly speech, went some way towards restoring Seoul’s place within Washington’s North Korea policy narrative. By engineering an inter-Korean thaw and catalysing a US–North Korea leaders’ meeting, Moon can also claim

some credit for breaking an escalatory cycle and laying the groundwork for the Singapore summit. But intra-alliance tensions could easily intensify if Seoul feels that its interests are being overlooked, and Washington's corresponding concern that South Korea will relax pressure on the North in its pursuit of inter-Korean engagement.⁹⁹ Pyongyang is keenly aware of these fault lines and will exploit them at every opportunity. Moon's role in the Korean melodrama, as both Pyongyang's presumptive emissary and intermediary with Washington, has shades of hubris. Having interposed himself between the United States and North Korea, the South Korean president may well find himself in an exposed position, less able to shape the course of events on the peninsula than he would like.

SINGAPORE SUMMIT

What of the prospects for the Singapore summit? At the time of writing, the Trump administration's maximalist insistence on complete, or "permanent" verifiable, irreversible disarmament appears poles apart from North Korea's looser definition of "denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula". Pyongyang's language conveys the impression of a confirmed nuclear weapons state potentially entering into an arms-control relationship with the United States on equal terms, hence Kim Kye Gwan's scornful dismissal of the "so-called Libya mode of nuclear abandonment".¹⁰⁰ This statement could play a helpful role in terms of tempering overinflated US expectations, particularly on the part of President Trump. Such signalling of maximum positions is not abnormal ahead of a negotiation. However, there are doubts about what the summit can realistically achieve, given the scant preparation time and gulf of mistrust that historically separates the United States and North Korea.

President Trump's embrace of political theatre is perhaps the overriding factor, providing enough of a common denominator with his North Korean counterpart to ensure that the summit will happen. Trump has said that he will walk away if Kim fails to offer acceptable terms.

Kim Jong-un's preference will be for a phased process of arms control with the United States, whereas Trump's advisers will press hard for tangible 'payment' upfront, including the destruction of nuclear warheads and missile airframes. A missile test moratorium and the closure of a now-redundant nuclear test site are unlikely to satisfy Washington. While verification is the obvious sticking point for the United States, a major problem for the North Koreans is that surrendering even one 'token' warhead or ICBM would yield precious intelligence on their overall capabilities, and is likely to be strongly resisted by the military. Even assuming progress can be made to remove the ICBM threat to the United States, leaving nuclear and short-to-medium range missiles in place will be deeply troubling for US allies in Northeast Asia, especially Japan given its current diplomatic isolation from the process.

Pyongyang's language conveys the impression of a confirmed nuclear weapons state potentially entering into an arms-control relationship with the United States on equal terms...

If the meeting proceeds favourably, the most likely scenario is for a symbolic declaration announcing a formal end to the Korean War. This will include a corresponding commitment to conclude a peace treaty, contingent on North Korea's undertaking to eliminate at least a portion of its nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and perhaps its chemical-biological arsenal too, in return for US security guarantees and eventual diplomatic normalisation.

CONCLUSION

The Trump–Kim combination has the dynamic potential to fundamentally rewrite the script, most likely to North Korea's advantage.

Since the start of 2018, the North Korean nuclear melodrama has flipped from fears of imminent armed conflict to heady optimism that the Korean War may itself be finally concluded. Bold transitions from confrontation to engagement have long been central to the North Korean script. It is a cycle Pyongyang has appeared doomed to repeat. What distinguishes the current iteration from previous cycles is Kim Jong-un's skill in playing North Korea's one, effective card to maximum effect — aided and abetted by the showmanship of Donald Trump. The Trump–Kim combination has the dynamic potential to fundamentally rewrite the script, most likely to North Korea's advantage.

As long as Kim Jong-un remains in power North Korea will never voluntarily give up its nuclear arsenal. Even if Pyongyang agrees in principle to trade away its ICBMs in return for US force reductions and security guarantees, it is likely to withhold some of this capability covertly. The regime's attachment to nuclear weapons stems, ultimately, from its insecurity about the 'unification problem', and resultant inability to lift its state of self-imposed siege. Given this structural constraint, Kim Jong-un has performed effectively as North Korea's lead actor in the current cycle, parlaying a position of weakness into one of relative strength by maximising North Korea's one meaningful source of international leverage. Now at the threshold of an operational ICBM capability, holding the United States directly at risk, North Korea's regional nuclear melodrama has finally gone global.

In so doing, North Korea has made the conceptual transition from proliferation problem to deterrence concern for Washington. Short of war or regime change, that means the United States will need to learn to live with Pyongyang as a de facto nuclear power, at least in regional terms, while relying on deterrence and continued pressure to constrain the North's nuclear arsenal and continuing proliferation potential. The global counter-proliferation imperative also requires inflicting sufficient punishment on the regime that other potential proliferators take notice of the cost. However, punitive sanctions must be offset against the legitimising value of granting Kim a summit. North Korea's leader and his country's nuclear missiles will in all likelihood be around significantly longer than President Trump.

Some form of deal between the Trump administration and Kim Jong-un's regime is possible, provided North Korea is prepared to accept denuclearisation as a substantive point for negotiation, beyond the aspirational goal of a nuclear-free peninsula. Kim Jong-un probably perceives greater promise in Donald Trump's dealmaker persona than he does real menace in the commander-in-chief's threats (John Bolton is another matter). The opportunity for Kim to sit down with a serving US president — something that neither of his predecessors accomplished — is likely to be too tempting to decline, despite the risk that a failed summit foreshortens the path towards war.

For the United States and its allies, the strategic implications thrown up by North Korea's nuclear challenge extend far beyond conflict avoidance. China and Russia provide poor analogues for the kind of strategic relationship that Washington is likely to develop with Pyongyang. There is no precedent for a minor, revisionist power developing an asymmetrical nuclear deterrence relationship with the United States. The result is unlikely to be stable.¹⁰¹ Maintaining credibility with its Northeast Asian allies, and trust in the broader framework of extended deterrence, will prove increasingly difficult for Washington, especially concerning the risk of decoupling in the US–South Korea alliance — the big potential payoff for Beijing. The US relationship with Pyongyang can never be binary in nature, for North Korea will always approach South Korea in zero-sum terms. When the dramatic cycle moves again towards provocation and crisis, South Korea may eventually conclude that it needs to acquire nuclear weapons of its own.

NOTES

¹ Madison Park, "Drones Drop Films, Information into N. Korea, Activists Say", CNN, 26 May 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/25/asia/north-korea-drones/index.html>.

² The seismic signature of Pyongyang's sixth and most recent underground explosion points to a yield of at least 120 kilotons, approximately ten times more powerful than the Hiroshima atomic bomb. That makes a thermonuclear design very likely. See Chris Baraniuk, "Seismic Tests Hint North Korea's Nuke Is its First Hydrogen Bomb", *New Scientist*, 4 September 2018, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2146148-seismic-tests-hint-north-koreas-nuke-is-its-first-hydrogen-bomb/>.

³ Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea Plans 'Decapitation Unit' to Try to Scare North's Leaders", *The New York Times*, 12 September 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/asia/north-south-korea-decapitation-.html>.

⁴ "US B-1B Bomber Flies Over Korean Peninsula", *Voice of America*, 6 December 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-korea-media-report-us-bombers-to-fly-over-peninsula/4151194.html>.

⁵ Eric Johnston, "Japan Gets Real: What to Do when the 10-minute Missile Warning Comes", *The Japan Times*, 24 April 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/24/national/japan-gets-real-what-do-to-when-the-10-minute-warning-comes/>.

⁶ "Hawaii Worker Who Sent Missile Alert Was '100% Sure' Attack Was Real", *The Guardian*, 4 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/03/hawaii-worker-sent-missile-alert-100-percent-sure-attack-real>.

⁷ "North Korea Threatens Australia with Disaster if it Continues to Support US Stance on Pyongyang", ABC News, 15 October 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-15/north-korea-warns-australia-face-disaster-continues-support-us/9051156>.

⁸ Max Fisher, "The Five Stages of North Korean Provocation", *The Washington Post*, 24 January 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/01/24/the-five-stages-of-north-korean-provocation/?utm_term=.0fdc8abbb312.

⁹ Euan Graham, "Security in the Asia Pacific: The Risks and Ramifications of Trump's Impulsive Adventurism", *The Guardian*, 10 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/10/trumps-impulsive-adventurism-and-security-in-the-asia-pacific-the-risks-and-ramifications>.

¹⁰ Tim Devaney, "Ex-Ambassador: Trump 'Trying to Out-North Korean the North Koreans'", *The Hill*, 16 April 2017, <http://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/329029-ex-ambassador-trump-trying-to-out-north-korean-the-north-koreans>.

¹¹ "US Hails Developments on Korean Peninsula Issue after Kim Jong Un's China Visit", Xinhua, 28 March 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/29/c_137074157.htm.

¹² Bryan Harris, “North Korea Threatens Nuclear Destruction of Japan”, *Financial Times*, 14 September 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/f1fd455c-990a-11e7-a652-cde3f882dd7b>.

¹³ Richard Mobley, “Historical Crises in North Korea: Lessons from the Capture of the USS *Pueblo* and the Shootdown of a US Navy EC-121 — 1968 and 1969”, *Studies in Intelligence* 59, No 1 (Extracts, March 2015), <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-59-no-1/pdfs/Revisiting-Pueblo-and-EC121.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ken Gause, “North Korea’s Provocation and Escalation Calculus: Dealing with the Kim Jong-un Regime”, Center for Naval Analyses, Washington DC, August 2015, www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA621100.

¹⁵ Joseph Nye, “Understanding the North Korea Threat”, *The Strategist*, 7 December 2018, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/understanding-the-north-korea-threat/>.

¹⁶ Anna Fifield, “25 Million Reasons the US Hasn’t Struck North Korea”, *The Washington Post*, 21 April 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/twenty-five-million-reasons-the-us-cant-strike-north-korea/2017/04/21/47df9fea-2513-11e7-928e-3624539060e8_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.46ae0fa92608.

¹⁷ Rod Lyon, “Confident Kim”, *The Strategist*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/confident-kim/>.

¹⁸ Noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz coined the term “Theatre State” with reference to nineteenth century Bali. In an observation that might just as easily apply to North Korea’s contemporary leaders, Geertz argued that Balinese nobles were primarily interested in dramatising their rank and political status through public rituals and ceremonies, rather than attention to public administration: Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹⁹ See Victor Cha and David Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

²⁰ Yoo Kang-moon and Hwan Joon-bum, “Feud of Old Men between Bolton and Kim Kye-gwan”, Hankyoreh, 17 May 2018, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/845083.html.

²¹ Josh Smith, “Along Fortified Korean Border, Olympics Bring more VIPs, Tourists”, Reuters, 8 February 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-2018-northkorea-dmz/along-fortified-korean-border-olympics-bring-more-vips-tourists-idUSKBN1FS0E9>.

²² Two previous inter-Korean leaders’ summits took place in Pyongyang in 2000 and 2007. Russell Goldman and Choe Sang-Hun, “North and South Korea Summit Is Short on Details, but Long on Theater”, *The New York Times*, 28 April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/27/world/asia/north-korea-south-border.html>.

²³ Euan Graham, “North Korea’s Historical Hall of Mirrors”, *Nikkei Asia Review*, 11 May 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints/Euan-Graham/North-Korea-s-historical-hall-of-mirrors>.

- ²⁴ See Jung H Pak, “Regime Insecurity or Regime Resilience? North Korea’s Grand Strategy in the Context of Nuclear and Missile Development”, Brookings Institution Report, January 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/regime-insecurity-or-regime-resilience-north-koreas-grand-strategy-in-the-context-of-nuclear-and-missile-development/>.
- ²⁵ Statement by DPRK Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ri Yong Ho, at the General Debate of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2017, https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/kp_en.pdf.
- ²⁶ Reudiger Frank, “President Moon’s North Korea Strategy”, *The Diplomat*, 13 July 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/president-moons-north-korea-strategy/>.
- ²⁷ Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, “US Banks on Diplomacy with North Korea, but Moves Ahead on Military Plans”, *The New York Times*, 28 February 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/28/world/asia/us-north-korea-military-war-planning.html?smid=tw-share>.
- ²⁸ “Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula”, ABC News, 27 April 2018, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-27/panmunjom-declaration-for-peace2c-prosperity-and-unification-o/9705794>.
- ²⁹ Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korea to Freeze South’s Assets at Kaesong Industrial Park”, *The New York Times*, 11 February 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/12/world/asia/north-south-korea-kaesong.html>.
- ³⁰ See Brian Myers, *North Korea’s Juche Myth* (Busan: Sthele Press, August 2015).
- ³¹ Paul French, *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula — A Modern History* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2015), 115–138.
- ³² Alistair Coleman and Upasana Bhat, “Mallima Speed! How to Decode North Korea’s Rhetoric”, BBC News, 14 October 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566753>.
- ³³ Based on a 2015 per capita purchasing power parity estimate of US\$1700 for North Korea, versus US\$37 500 for South Korea, according to the CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html>.
- ³⁴ See Danny Hajek and Arezou Rezvani, “Watching Foreign Movies Is Illegal in North Korea, but Some Do it Anyway”, National Public Radio, 5 July 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/07/05/534742750/watching-foreign-movies-is-illegal-in-north-korea-but-plenty-do-it-anyway>.
- ³⁵ Choe Sang-Hun, “Olympic Dreams of a United Korea? Many in South Say, ‘No, Thanks’”, *The New York Times*, 28 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/28/world/asia/koreas-olympics-reunification.html>.
- ³⁶ Jamie Tarabay, “After North and South Korea’s Olympic Rapprochement, a Reality Check”, CNN, 26 February 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/25/asia/north-south-korea-post-olympics-intl/index.html>.
- ³⁷ Uri Friedman, “Can Trump Make a Deal with North Korea?”, *The Atlantic*, 17 August 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/trump-deal-north-korea/536958/>.

- ³⁸ Intriguingly, on his visit to South Korea in November, President Trump is reported to have asked President Moon, “Do you have to reunify?”. See Josh Rogin, “Trump Asks South Korea’s President: ‘Do You Have to Reunify?’”, *The Washington Post*, 15 November 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/11/15/trump-asks-south-koreas-president-do-you-have-to-reunify/?utm_term=.f40db3511220.
- ³⁹ Brian R Myers, “North Korea’s Race Problem”, *Foreign Policy*, 11 February 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/02/11/north-koreas-race-problem/>.
- ⁴⁰ Confidential interview with a former Australian defence official, Sydney, July 2018.
- ⁴¹ Brian R Myers, “North Korea’s Unification Drive”, Sthele Press, Busan, 21 December 2017, <http://sthelepress.com/index.php/2017/12/21/north-koreas-unification-drive/>.
- ⁴² “North Korea Country Profile”, Lowy Institute Asia Power Index, 2018, <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/countries.php?profile=118>.
- ⁴³ Hamish Macdonald and Leo Byrne, “Thae Yong Ho Assesses Kim Jong Un’s Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons”, *NK News*, 31 October 2017, <https://www.nknews.org/2017/10/thae-yong-ho-assesses-kim-jong-uns-pursuit-of-nuclear-weapons/>.
- ⁴⁴ Leon Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- ⁴⁵ Joel Wit, Daniel Poneman and Robert Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).
- ⁴⁶ Walter Pincus, “N. Korea’s Nuclear Plans Were No Secret”, *The Washington Post*, 1 February 2003, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/02/01/n-koreas-nuclear-plans-were-no-secret/cdc1f774-a857-4732-a1cb-86fc78637d82/?utm_term=.c5dcec3cbc41.
- ⁴⁷ Selig Harrison, “Did North Korea Cheat?”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2005-01-01/did-north-korea-cheat>.
- ⁴⁸ Jonathan Pollack, “North Korea’s Nuclear and Missile Programs: Strategies, Directions, and Prospects”, Brookings Institution, January 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/north-koreas-nuclear-and-missile-programs-strategies-directions-and-prospects/>.
- ⁴⁹ Christopher Green, “Wrapped in a Fog: The DPRK Constitution and the Ten Principles”, in Adam Cathcart, Robert Winstanley-Chesters and Christopher Green eds, *Change and Continuity in North Korean Politics* (London: Routledge, 2017), 26–28.
- ⁵⁰ “North Korea Vows to Keep Making Nuclear Weapons, Decorates Creators of Latest Missile”, ABC News, 13 December 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-13/north-korea-vows-to-keep-making-nuclear-weapons/9254958>.
- ⁵¹ Christine Kim and Jane Chung, “North Korea 2016 Economic Growth at 17-year High Despite Sanctions: South Korea”, Reuters, 21 July 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-economy-gdp/north-korea-2016-economic-growth-at-17-year-high-despite-sanctions-south-korea-idUSKBN1A607Z>.

- ⁵² Choe Sang-Hun, "5 Days After Failed Missile Test by North Korea, Another Failure", *The New York Times*, 19 October 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/20/world/asia/north-korea-musudan-missile-failure.html?mtrref=www.google.com.au&gwh=1996C70375B089B1155247BBFC30EDC5&gwt=pay>.
- ⁵³ There are widespread suspicions that Pyongyang's step-change in technical performance is attributable to foreign assistance, although opinions differ on the most likely source. See William Broad and David Sanger, "North Korea's Missile Success Is Linked to Ukrainian Plant, Investigators Say", *The New York Times*, 14 August 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/world/asia/north-korea-missiles-ukraine-factory.html>.
- ⁵⁴ Euan Graham, "North Korea: Reaching for Armageddon", *The Interpreter*, 16 September 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/north-korea-reaching-armageddon>.
- ⁵⁵ David Sanger and William Broad, "How US Intelligence Agencies Underestimated North Korea", *The New York Times*, 6 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/06/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-missile-intelligence.html>.
- ⁵⁶ Ankit Panda, "The Hwasong-15: The Anatomy of North Korea's New ICBM", *The Diplomat*, 6 December 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/the-hwasong-15-the-anatomy-of-north-koreas-new-icbm/>.
- ⁵⁷ "North Korea Diplomat Says Take Atmospheric Nuclear Test Threat 'Literally'", Reuters, 26 October 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-nuclear-warning/north-korea-diplomat-says-take-atmospheric-nuclear-test-threat-literally-idUSKBN1CU2EI>.
- ⁵⁸ Jesse Johnson, "North Korean Missile Drill Simulated Targeting Iwakuni Base, Analysis Shows", *The Japan Times*, 8 March 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/03/08/national/north-korean-missile-drill-simulated-targeting-iwakuni-base-analysis-shows/>.
- ⁵⁹ Julian Borger, "CIA Chief Draws New 'Red Line' on North Korea Nuclear Buildup", *The Guardian*, 24 January 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/23/cia-chief-says-north-korea-is-a-handful-of-months-from-endangering-us>.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Thae Yong Ho, Seoul, May 2017.
- ⁶¹ Macdonald and Byrne, "Thae Yong Ho Assesses Kim Jong Un's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons.
- ⁶² Uri Friedman, "North Korea Says It Has 'Completed' Its Nuclear Program", *The Atlantic*, 29 November 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/north-korea-nuclear/547019/>.
- ⁶³ Justin McCurry, "North Korea Halts Nuclear and Missile Tests Ahead of Planned Trump Summit", *The Guardian*, 21 April 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/20/north-korea-suspends-nuclear-missile-tests>.
- ⁶⁴ Joseph Bermudez, "North Korea's Submarine Ballistic Missile Program Moves Ahead: Indications of Shipbuilding and Missile Ejection Testing", *38 North*, 16 November 2017, <https://www.38north.org/2017/11/sinpo111617/>.

- ⁶⁵ “Missiles of North Korea”, Missile Threat, CSIS Missile Defense Project, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/dprk/>.
- ⁶⁶ McCurry, “North Korea Halts Nuclear and Missile Tests Ahead of Planned Trump Summit”.
- ⁶⁷ Statement by DPRK Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ri Yong Ho, at the General Debate of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 23 September 2017, https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/kp_en.pdf.
- ⁶⁸ Ankit Panda, “How North Korea’s ICBM and New ‘Thermonuclear’ Bomb Might ‘Decouple’ the US and Its Allies”, *The Diplomat*, 4 September 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/how-north-koreas-icbm-and-new-thermonuclear-bomb-might-decouple-the-us-and-its-allies/>.
- ⁶⁹ Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 43–47.
- ⁷⁰ Alexandra Field, Jo Shelley and James Griffiths, “South Korean Opposition Leader: Nukes Are the Only Way to Guarantee Peace”, CNN, 19 October 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/18/asia/south-korea-trump-nukes/index.html>.
- ⁷¹ Evans Revere, “2017: Year of Decision on the Korean Peninsula”, Brookings Institution Report, 8 February 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/fp_20170208_evans_revere_krins.pdf.
- ⁷² Gregory Hellman, “Trump Rules Out North Korea ‘Freeze-for-Freeze’ Deal”, *Politico*, 16 November 2016, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/morning-defense/2017/11/16/trump-rules-out-north-korea-freeze-for-freeze-deal-223381>.
- ⁷³ Jesse Johnson, “Trump Adviser Steve Bannon Open to Withdrawing US Troops from South Korea if North Freezes Nuclear Program”, *The Japan Times*, 17 August 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/17/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/trump-adviser-bannon-open-withdrawing-u-s-troops-south-korea-north-gives-nukes/#.WpZjPndh2IM>.
- ⁷⁴ Yen Nee Lee, “Trump Has Reportedly Asked the Pentagon to Look into Fewer US Troops in South Korea”, CNBC, 3 May 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/03/trump-asks-pentagon-to-consider-us-troop-reduction-in-south-korea-report.html>.
- ⁷⁵ Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, “US Troops in South Korea Not ‘On the Table’ in Initial North Korea Talks”, Reuters, 10 May 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-usa-military/u-s-troops-in-south-korea-not-on-the-table-in-initial-north-korea-talks-idUSKBN1IA2M7>.
- ⁷⁶ Jesse Johnson, “Mike Pompeo Optimistic on Kim–Trump Summit, but ‘America First’ Remarks Likely to Trigger Concern in Tokyo and Seoul”, *The Japan Times*, 13 April 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/13/world/politics-diplomacy-world/no-reward-north-korea-without-irreversible-denuclearization-pompeo-tells-confirmation-hearing/#.WtF0mmap3BK>.
- ⁷⁷ In the event, the deal collapsed within weeks as North Korea mounted a satellite rocket launch. See Ankit Panda, “A Great Leap to Nowhere: Remembering the US–North Korea ‘Leap Day’ Deal”, *The Diplomat*, 29 February 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/a-great-leap-to-nowhere-remembering-the-us-north-korea-leap-day-deal/>.

⁷⁸ In a 1999 CNN interview with Wolf Blitzer, Donald Trump expressed his view that the United States faced a choice between negotiating with North Korea over missiles, or taking “drastic actions” within five years: See “What Trump Said about North Korean Nukes in 1999”, YouTube, published by CNN on 9 August 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-1WE-ivtO4>.

⁷⁹ Ankit Panda, “Trump Administration Introduces New Executive Order on North Korea Sanctions”, *The Diplomat*, 22 September 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/trump-administration-introduces-new-executive-order-on-north-korea-sanctions/>.

⁸⁰ “Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly”, United Nations, New York, 19 September 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>; “Trump Warns N Korea that US Military Is ‘Locked and Loaded’”, BBC News, 11 August 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40901746>.

⁸¹ Steve Holland, “Trump Denies Saying He Probably Had a Good Relationship with Kim”, Reuters, 15 January 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-northkorea/trump-denies-saying-he-probably-had-good-relationship-with-kim-idUSKBN1F30PB>.

⁸² Martin Pengelly, Ed Pilkington, Tom Phillips and Justin McCurry, “Trump Says Rex Tillerson ‘Wasting His Time’ with North Korea Negotiations”, *The Guardian*, 2 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/01/donald-trump-rex-tillerson-north-korea-time-wasting>.

⁸³ Matthew Lee and Zeke Miller, “US Officials Say Pompeo Has Met with NKorea’s Kim”, Associated Press, 18 April 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/d909cf6ad7b44936a9365d85e22a254e/US-officials-say-Pompeo-has-met-with-NKorea's-Kim>.

⁸⁴ See, for example, John Bolton, “The Legal Case for Striking North Korea First”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 February 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-legal-case-for-striking-north-korea-first-1519862374>; and Edward Luttwak, “It’s Time to Bomb North Korea”, *Foreign Policy*, 8 January 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/08/its-time-to-bomb-north-korea/>.

⁸⁵ Ryan Brown and Barbara Starr, “McMaster: Potential for War with North Korea ‘Increasing Every Day’”, CNN, 4 December 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/02/politics/mcmaster-potential-war-north-korea/index.html>.

⁸⁶ Josh Rogin, “Pence: The United States Is Ready to Talk with North Korea”, *The Washington Post*, 11 February 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/pence-the-united-states-is-ready-to-talk-with-north-korea/2018/02/11/b5070ed6-0f33-11e8-9065-e55346f6de81_story.html?utm_term=.77c56aefcb77.

⁸⁷ On Asia experts who signed “never Trump” letters, see Aaron Connelly, *Autopilot: East Asia Policy under Trump*, Lowy Institute Analysis (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2017), https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/autopilot-east-asia-policy-under-trump#_edn19.

⁸⁸ David Nakamura and Anne Gearan, “Disagreement on North Korea Policy Derails White House Choice for Ambassador to South Korea”, *The Washington Post*, 30 January 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/disagreement->

on-north-korea-policy-could-derail-white-house-choice-for-ambassador-to-south-korea/2018/01/30/3a21191c-05da-11e8-94e8-e8b8600ade23_story.html?utm_term=.c8b5dcf9c431.

⁸⁹ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, January 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁹⁰ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁹¹ Ayanna Alexander, "DNI Coats: North Korea Is an 'Existential Threat'", *Politico*, 13 February 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/13/north-korea-dan-coats-407271>.

⁹² Tom O'Connor, "North Korea Threatened to Destroy New York Because of Trump's Twitter Fingers", *Newsweek*, 12 June 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/north-korea-attack-new-york-nuclear-missile-claim-624662>.

⁹³ "President Donald J Trump's State of the Union Address", Remarks as prepared for delivery, 30 January 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address/>.

⁹⁴ See Megan Brennan, "North Korea Surges to Top of US Enemies List", Gallup Poll Social Series, 19 February 2018.

⁹⁵ Lydia Saad, "More Back US Military Action vs North Korea than in 2003", Gallup Poll Social Series, 15 September 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/219134/back-military-action-north-korea-2003.aspx>.

⁹⁶ Mira Rapp-Hooper, "The Cataclysm That Would Follow a 'Bloody Nose' Strike in North Korea", *The Atlantic*, 31 January 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/the-cataclysm-that-would-follow-a-bloody-nose-strike-in-north-korea/551924/>.

⁹⁷ Sam Roggeveen, "North Korea's ICBM Weakens Washington's Hand in Asia", *The Interpreter*, 5 July 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/north-korea-icbm>.

⁹⁸ Damian Paletta, "Trump Preparing Withdrawal from South Korea Trade Deal, a Move Opposed by Top Aides", *The Washington Post*, 2 September 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/02/trump-plans-withdrawal-from-south-korea-trade-deal/?utm_term=.6df89ff1f9b4.

⁹⁹ "South Korea's Moon Says No Military Action without Seoul's Consent", Reuters, 15 August 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ww2-anniversary-southkorea/south-koreas-moon-says-no-military-action-without-seouls-consent-idUSKCN1AV04G>.

¹⁰⁰ "North Korea's Full Statement on Meeting with Trump", *The New York Times*, 15 May 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/15/world/asia/north-korea-statement-trump.html>.

¹⁰¹ Rod Lyon, "Relationships between Highly Asymmetric Nuclear Powers", *The Strategist*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/relationships-highly-asymmetric-nuclear-powers/>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Euan Graham

Dr Euan Graham is Director of the International Security Program at the Lowy Institute. He has been a close observer of East Asian security affairs for more than 20 years, in academia, the private sector, and for the British Government. Euan joined the Institute from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore where he was a Senior Fellow specialising in maritime issues. Prior to this he was a research analyst in the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and served as Chargé d'Affaires at the British Embassy in Pyongyang.

Euan's research interests include Australian defence policy, maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas, nuclear proliferation, the US rebalance to Asia and defence diplomacy. His book *Japan's Sea Lane Security 1940–2004: A Matter of Life and Death?* (Routledge) was the first comprehensive English-language analysis on this subject. Euan obtained his PhD from the Australian National University in 2003. He remains an Associate Fellow at the UK Royal United Services Institute.

Euan Graham
egraham@lowyinstitute.org

LOWY INSTITUTE

Level 3, 1 Bligh Street
Sydney NSW 2000 Australia

Tel: +61 2 8238 9000
Fax: +61 2 8238 9005

www.lowyinstitute.org
twitter: [@lowyinstitute](https://twitter.com/lowyinstitute)