

## China, and North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions

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In late July, North Korea [again](#) demonstrated its capability to range the entire U.S. with another ballistic missile test. And just this week, the DIA determined the North Korean regime can indeed make a warhead small enough to fit on a ballistic missile. As a result of these actions, the debate in the U.S. has intensified over the appropriate response.

The range of options is considerable, although all rest on widely different assumptions and understandings of the origin, nature, and purpose of the North Korean rockets. And that is part of the problem facing American policy makers.

We are not all singing from the same sheet of music.

For example, does the North Korean missile program represent Pyongyang's quest for [regime security](#) based on the idea the U.S. is gunning for using military force to secure regime change?

Are the missiles [capable of reaching](#) the U.S. reliable, or are they overt propaganda? Is the quest for a denuclearized Korean peninsula a pipe dream, better now jettisoned? Alternatively, is such a prospect within reach if the U.S. shows "[maturity](#)" and reaches out to make a deal with Pyongyang?

Is the threat that North Korea would launch a nuclear-armed missile at the U.S. [fanciful](#) since an attack would garner massive U.S. retaliation leaving North Korea in ruins? Alternatively, perhaps the missiles are for coercion and blackmail or even an [EMP](#) attack that could be launched surreptitiously?

Moreover, finally, isn't it true that China, as much as the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, wishes the North Korean nuclear program would [go away](#) or is the Chinese regime complicit in the North's nukes and missile development?

Such is the conundrum in which American officials find our North Korean and our nuclear nonproliferation and counter-proliferation policy.

### How should the U.S. address the current crisis?

My two years as a student at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, studying under Professor Hahn Pyong Choon, former Ambassador to the United Nations and the U.S., greatly influenced my analysis. In his lectures, he emphasized that North Korea's premier ambition is to reunify the Korean peninsula under its rule. Sadly, and tragically, he was [murdered](#) in a North Korean terrorist attack in Myanmar that killed most of the South Korean Cabinet during a state visit.

Also, important to my perspective is my professional work with General Mike Dunn, the past President of both the National Defense University and the Air Force Association. He developed a ten-step North Korean pyramid which included at its pinnacle the reunification of the Korean peninsula under Pyongyang's communist rule. General Dunn should know — he served in the Headquarters of the United Nations Command and U.S. Forces Korea and was the lead negotiator for the U.S. at P'anmunjom.

General Dunn had interviewed the highest ranking North Korean defector ever and asked why the North was building nuclear weapons. Showing surprise, the former chief of North Korea's parliament — believed to have been a mentor to Kim Jong Il and a confidant of his father, Kim Il Sung — Hwang Jang-yop told

General Dunn the North has nuclear weapons to prevent the U.S. from defending South Korea following an invasion by Pyongyang to seize control over the peninsula.

### **Korean unification under North Korea.**

If the goal of North Korea is to reunify the Korean peninsula, that would require the U.S. to remove its extended nuclear deterrent, U.S. military forces, from South Korea and the region. Not surprisingly, that is exactly what Doug Bandow of the CATO Institute from the far right and [David Vine](#), author of Base Nation, and from the far left, argue we should do.

According to Tom Reed, the former deputy national security adviser to President Reagan and Secretary of the Air Force under President Ford, in his book “The Nuclear Express,” the [Chinese in 1980](#) made a conscious decision to arm its allies with nuclear weapons technology. The Khan “Nukes ‘R Us” network in Pakistan grew out of this [Chinese assistance](#) to Pakistan in building its first nuclear weapons. Subsequently, Khan and the Pakistani government helped provide nuclear weapons technology to Iran, Libya, Iraq, and North Korea.

According to unclassified intelligence reports to Congress, there are five key Chinese banks and a specially created holding company that funds the North Korean missile and nuclear technology programs. Chinese companies profit handsomely in this work. As former intelligence officer Bruce Klingner told a Mitchell Institute seminar earlier this spring, the North Korean rockets we recovered showed detailed markings of both Chinese and Russian origins.

### **What is China up to?**

China sees North Korea’s nuclear missile threat as a means to dissolve the U.S.–South Korean alliance, thus creating Korean reunification under an authoritarian North Korean regime.

It is also true that some military elements in China rue the day they helped create this North Korean Frankenstein. These same elements see the possibility that in response to the North Korean threats, Japan and South Korea may decide to build their own [nuclear arsenals](#), completely unacceptable for China.

The U.S. understands that while China does have critical leverage over the North, China is not willing to use it. China wanted to retain North Korea’s newfound nuclear power while assuaging any aspirations for nuclear-armed neighbors in South Korea and Japan.

### **How to respond?**

Pushing China hard on sanctions is the next step and going after banks and industrial elements in China that are critical to North Korea’s missile and nuclear capability. China may call our bluff and dare South Korea and Japan to go nuclear, rather than leaning hard on North Korea.

This will set up a test of wills within the China and the Chinese Communist Party. They will assess whether the U.S. and allies in Japan and South Korea are serious in countering the North Korean threat. Therefore, is China’s strategy of the [100-year marathon](#) to continue to world hegemony, or do they step back from the brink and put on hold the idea of driving the U.S. from the Pacific?

In this light, Chinese actions or relative inaction become clear as part of a broader strategy. The Trump administration’s nuanced strategy combining diplomacy, economic sanctions, and the threat of military force makes sense as well. Will China’s 100-year marathon strategy remain on schedule or will the

values of liberal democracies prevail?

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