

A Multilateral Approach to North Korea

The Trump administration has threatened a unilateral armed attack on North Korea in an attempt to deter a nuclear conflict, however, cooperating with the international community offers much more effective possibilities for peace. Trump's message to the UN has been clear since he entered office, when it comes to North Korea, we have bigger bombs. The Trump administration's Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Susan Thornton, stated in an interview with David Greene, that the U.S. was implementing, "a strategy on North Korea which involves ramping up as much pressure as we can from the international community," however Trump's policies toward North Korea have only isolated the U.S. from the international sphere (Greene). A more multilateral approach involving strict economic sanctions would be more effective in controlling North Korea's nuclear threat.

In a more Multilateral approach, the UN has recently placed new sanctions on North Korea cutting off some oil and most textile imports; these policies are aimed at defunding their nuclear programs. The Trump administration claims that they are also using diplomatic pressure that involves Japan and South Korea; these allies are also involved in a military deterrent plan. According to Susan Thornton, Trump's aggressive rhetoric when he threatens armed conflict is a strategic attempt to make sure there is no miscalculation within Kim Jong Un's isolated regime. However, there are more effective multilateral approaches to deterring North Korea from using its nuclear weapons, than the more unilateral Trump threat.

One downside of Trump's unilateralism is his unachievable threat of military force. (Jentleson). For one, the threatened targeted nuclear attack on North Korea would not work. U.S. commanders lack sufficient intelligence about targets within North Korea, making a targeted attack ineffective, and bordering on impossible. (Singh). Secondly, the U.S. could not use missiles on North Korea without it drastically affecting U.S. allies. South Korea is located too close to North Korea for the U.S. to effectively defend them against a nuclear attack, and the radiation from a U.S. attack on North Korea would threaten Japan. (Singh). An effective unilateral attack would have to involve the U.N. and be led by the U.S., which is an unlikely possibility (Jentleson). The Trump administration can claim they are using a cooperative approach to deterring North Korea, to force them back into the international sphere, but they are threatening targeted missile strikes that are not believable threats, as they would diminish the U.S. allies in the international community, and the U.S. does not have the information to stage such a strategic attack.

The U.S. claims they are deterring North Korea with economic sanctions however to have effective preemptive or preventive strategies, one must assume a country can be persuaded to alter its policies. (Freedman). However, it is unlikely that North Korea would agree to freeze its nuclear program, even with these imposed economic sanctions, as they would have to forfeit their national security. They find ways to continue to fund nuclear programs. Furthermore, neither the U.S. nor North Korea has a reason to trust the other to follow through on international nuclear agreements. North Korea has cheated on past accords, and the U.S. recently backed out of its nuclear agreements with Iran,

although all evidence suggested Iran was following the agreement. (New Jersey Opinion). Since neither country trusts each other, the U.S. should look to the international community more when dealing with North Korea.

Instead of threatening unrealistic military threats, the U.S. should focus on a more multilateral approach to their forging policy legislation toward North Korea militarily. Ideally, the U.S. should shift to placing more aggressive economic sanctions on North Korea, with the help of the international community, especially China, and should increase its aid to Japan, and South Korea, its military allies. However, Trump's aggressive rhetoric toward North Korea only isolates the United States from the international community.