



Written by [Patrick J. Buchanan](#) on December 1, 2017

## Little Rocket Man's Risky Game

In the morning darkness of Wednesday, Kim Jong Un launched an ICBM that rose almost 2,800 miles into the sky before falling into the Sea of Japan.

North Korea now has the proven ability to hit Washington, D.C.

Unproven still is whether Kim can put a miniaturized nuclear warhead atop that missile, which could be fired with precision, and survive the severe vibrations of re-entry. More tests and more time are needed for that.



Thus, U.S. markets brushed off the news of Kim's Hwasong-15 missile and roared to record heights on Wednesday and Thursday.

President Donald Trump took it less well. "Little Rocket Man" is one "sick puppy," he told an audience in Missouri.

U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley told the Security Council that "if war comes ... the North Korean regime will be utterly destroyed." She then warned Xi Jinping that "if China does not halt the oil shipments" to North Korea, "we can take the oil situation into our own hands."

Is Haley talking about bombing pipelines in North Korea — or China?

The rage of the president and bluster of Haley reflect a painful reality: As inhumane and ruthless as the 33-year-old dictator of North Korea is, he is playing the highest stakes poker game on the planet, against the world's superpower, and playing it remarkably well.

Reason: Kim may understand us better than we do him, which is why he seems less hesitant to invite the risks of a war he cannot win.

While a Korean War II might well end with annihilation of the North's army and Kim's regime, it would almost surely result in untold thousands of dead South Koreans and Americans.

And Kim knows that the more American lives he can put at risk, with nuclear-tipped missiles, the less likely the Americans are to want to fight him.

His calculation has thus far proven correct.

As long as he does not push the envelope too far, and force Trump to choose war rather than living with a North Korea that could rain nuclear rockets on the U.S., Kim may win the confrontation.

Why? Because the concessions Kim is demanding are not beyond the utterly unacceptable.

What does Kim want?

Initially, he wants a halt to U.S.-South Korean military exercises, which he sees as a potential prelude to a surprise attack. He wants an end to sanctions, U.S. recognition of his regime, and acceptance of his status as a nuclear weapons state. Down the road, he wants a U.S. withdrawal of all forces from South



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Korea and international aid.

Earlier administrations — Clinton, Bush II, Obama — have seen many of these demands as negotiable. And accepting some or even all of them would entail no grave peril to U.S. national security or vital interests.

They would entail, however, a serious loss of face.

Acceptance of such demands by the United States would be a triumph for Kim, validating his risky nuclear strategy, and a diplomatic defeat for the United States.

Little Rocket Man would have bested The Donald.

Moreover, the credibility of the U.S. deterrent would be called into question. South Korea and Japan could be expected to consider their own deterrents, out of fear the U.S. would never truly put its homeland at risk, but would cut a deal at their expense.

We would hear again the cries of “Munich” and the shade of Neville Chamberlain would be called forth for ritual denunciation.

Yet it is a time for truth: Our demand for “denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,” is not going to be met, absent a U.S. war and occupation of North Korea.

Kim saw how Bush II, when it served U.S. interests, pulled out of our 30-year-old ABM treaty with Moscow. He saw how, after he gave up all his WMD to reach an accommodation with the West, Moammar Gadhafi was attacked by NATO and ended up being lynched.

He can see how much Americans honor nuclear treaties they sign by observing universal GOP howls to kill the Iranian nuclear deal and bring about “regime change” in Tehran, despite Iran letting U.N. inspectors roam the country to show they have no nuclear weapons program.

For America’s post-Cold War enemies, the lesson is clear:

Give up your WMD, and you wind up like Gadhafi and Saddam Hussein. Build nuclear weapons that can threaten Americans, and you get respect.

Kim Jong Un would be a fool to give up his missiles and nukes, and while the man is many things, a fool is not one of them.

We are nearing a point where the choice is between a war with North Korea in which thousands would die, or confirming that the U.S. is not willing to put its homeland at risk to keep Kim from keeping what he already has — nuclear weapons and missiles to deliver them.

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