



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 15, 2017

Lindsey Graham Predicts 30 Percent Chance Trump Attacks N. Korea

In an interview with *The Atlantic* published on December 14, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.; shown) said there is a “three in 10 chance” that the United States will take military action against North Korea if the communist regime conducts another long-range ballistic missile test. Moreover, Graham said that those odds would increase to “70 percent” if the North Koreans conduct an additional test of a nuclear bomb.



The Atlantic cited the senator’s statement that the issue of North Korea came up during a round of golf he played with the president on Sunday, December 10. “It comes up all the time,” he said.

“War with North Korea is an all-out war against the regime,” said Graham. “There is no surgical strike option. Their [nuclear-weapons] program is too redundant, it’s too hardened, and you gotta assume the worst, not the best. So if you ever use the military option, it’s not to just neutralize their nuclear facilities—you gotta be willing to take the regime completely down.”

“We’re not to the tipping point yet,” Graham pointed out, but “if they test another [nuclear] weapon, then all bets are off.”

“I don’t know how to say it any more direct: If nothing changes, Trump’s gonna have to use the military option, because time is running out,” said Graham.

A report about Graham’s interview in *The Hill* noted that Graham said he supports direct talks or a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

“I’m not taking anything off the table to avoid a war,” the senator said. “When they write the history of the times, I don’t want them to say, ‘Hey, Lindsey Graham wouldn’t even talk to the guy.’ ”

In an earlier report on December 13, *The Hill* cited State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert, who said two days earlier that Tillerson would appear in a Security Council Ministerial Briefing regarding North Korea’s nuclear weapons program on December 15.

The State Department website posted a transcript of Tillerson’s remarks at the UN Security Council Ministerial Meeting on D.P.R.K after the meeting. Tillerson said, in part:

Upon taking office, President Trump identified North Korea as the United States’s greatest national security threat. That judgment remains the same today.

After its ICBM launch on November the 29th, the North Korean Government claimed that it now possessed the capability to strike any location in the continental United States. North Korea’s growing capabilities reflect a direct threat to our security and the security of the entire world. We do not regard this claim as an empty threat....

In face of such a threat, inaction is unacceptable for any nation. Through a series of robust Security



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Council resolutions, this body has taken a leading role in condemning North Korea's unlawful nuclear and missile programs and imposing consequences. The international community remains firm in our determination that we will not accept a nuclear North Korea.

Each UN member state must fully implement all existing UN Security Council resolutions....

We have been clear that all options remain on the table in the defense of our nation, but we do not seek, nor do we want, war with North Korea. The United States will use all necessary measures to defend itself against North Korean aggression, but our hope remains that diplomacy will produce a resolution. As I said earlier this week, a sustained cessation of North Korea's threatening behavior must occur before talks can begin. North Korea must earn its way back to the table. The pressure campaign must, and will, continue until denuclearization is achieved. We will, in the meantime, keep our channels of communication open.

Our message today is one that this body has heard before, and one that we will continue to repeat: The United States will not allow the regime in Pyongyang to hold the world hostage.

It seems safe to assume at that at such an important meeting, Tillerson's remarks represented the official policies of the Trump administration, since every member of the cabinet serves at the pleasure of the president. Though the press, including not only *The Hill*, but also the *New York Times* have tried to portray some sort of disagreement between Trump and Tillerson over what U.S. policy towards North Korea should be, that hardly seems likely.

An article in the *Times* on December 13 began: "President Trump and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson are once again at odds over how to deal with nuclear-armed North Korea after Mr. Tillerson declared on Tuesday that the United States was ready to open talks with the North 'without precondition.' "

The *Times* noted that the same day, in an "unusual" statement released to reporters on the evening of Tiller's remarks, Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump's position on North Korea had not changed — namely, that talks were pointless if the North's leader, Kim Jong-un, continued to menace his neighbors.

Instead of being at odds with his secretary of state, it is much more likely that Trump is using Tillerson's statements as a trial balloon, to gauge reaction from the North Koreans before settling on a final position.

One troubling aspect of Tillerson's remarks, however, is his reliance on Security Council resolutions. Time after time, U.S. presidential administrations have relied on such resolutions as a substitute for our own independent foreign policy. A prime example is when former President George W. Bush addressed the Security Council on September 12, 2002 and outlined a catalogue of complaints against the Iraqi government that included violations of several Security Council resolutions. On September 17, Bush and UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw declared the period of diplomacy to be over, as declared by Resolution 1441's prohibition on giving Iraq new opportunities for compliance, and that no further authorization from the UN would be sought before an invasion of Iraq.

The problem is that the United States should never seek authorization from the UN to conduct foreign policy, even if that policy is as bad as the invasion of Iraq was, since the president never sought a declaration of war, as the Constitution requires. For the U.S. president to seek authorization from the UN to conduct a military operation is an abandonment of our power to act as a sovereign nation. Likewise, for the president to invade another nation without asking Congress to declare war is an abandonment of constitutional principle.



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Photo of Sen. Lindsey Graham: AP Images

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