

Is 'Little Rocket Man' Winning?

As of Dec. 26, Kim Jong Un's "Christmas gift" to President Donald Trump had not arrived. Most foreign policy analysts predict it will be a missile test more impressive than any Pyongyang has yet carried off.
By Pat Buchanan
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What is Kim's game? What does Kim want?

He cannot want war with the United States, as this could result in the annihilation of the Kim family dynasty that has ruled North Korea since World War II. Kim is all about self-preservation.

What he appears to want in his confrontation with Trump is a victory without war. In the near-term, Kim seeks three things: recognition of his regime as the legitimate government of North Korea and its acceptance in all the forums of the world, trade and an end to all U.S. and U.N. sanctions, and a nuclear arsenal sufficient to deter a U.S. attack, including missiles that can strike U.S. bases in South Korea, Japan, Guam, and the Western Pacific. And he seeks the capability to deliver a nuclear warhead on the U.S. mainland.

Nor is this last goal unreasonable from Kim's vantage point.

For he knows what became of the two other nations of George W. Bush's "axis of evil" that failed to develop nuclear weapons.

Saddam Hussein's Iraq was invaded, and he was hanged and his sons hunted down and killed.

The Ayatollah's Iran negotiated a 2015 nuclear deal with America and opened up its nuclear facilities to intrusive inspections to show that Tehran did not have a nuclear weapons program.

Trump came to power, trashed the deal, reimposed sanctions and is choking Iran to death.

Moammar Gadhafi surrendered his WMD in 2004 and opened up his production facilities. And in 2011, the U.S. attacked Libya and Gadhafi was lynched by a mob.

Contrast the fate of these regimes and rulers with the Kim family's success. His father, Kim Jong Il, tested nuclear weapons and missiles in defiance of U.S. warnings, and now the son is invited to summits with the U.S. president in Singapore and Hanoi.

If Kim did not have nuclear weapons, would American presidents be courting him? Would U.S. secretaries of state be visiting Pyongyang? If Kim did not have nuclear weapons who would pay the least attention to the Hermit Kingdom?

Undeniably, with his promised "Christmas gift," possibly a missile capable of hitting the U.S., Kim is pushing the envelope. He is taunting the Americans. We have told him what he must do. And he is telling us where we can go.

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By so doing Kim has put the ball squarely in Trump's court.

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The question Trump faces: Is he prepared to accept North Korea joining Russia and China as a third adversarial power with the ability to launch a nuclear strike on the continental United States?
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And if U.S. sanctions are insufficient to force Kim to "denuclearize," as seems apparent, is Trump prepared to force him to do so? Is Trump prepared to use "fire and fury" to remove Kim's nukes?

With 28,500 U.S. troops and thousands of U.S. citizens in South Korea, many within artillery range of the DMZ, is Trump prepared to risk a clash that could ignite a second Korean War in the election year 2020?

Is the president prepared for whatever that might bring?

How does this confrontation play out?

A guess: The U.S. has lived with North Korea's nuclear weapons for a decade, and Trump is not going to risk a second Korean conflict with a military attack on Kim's nuclear and missile arsenals. Kim Jong Un and his father have created a new reality in Korea, and we are going to have to live with it.

Where does East Asia go from here?

South Korea has twice the population of the North and an economy 40 times as large. Japan has a population five times that of North Korea and an economy 100 times as large.

If the U.S. treaty guarantees, dating to the 1950s, to fight for these two nations come into question as a result of America's reluctance to face down Pyongyang more forcibly on its nuclear arsenal, these nations are almost certain to start considering all options for their future security.

Among these are building their own nuclear arsenals and closer ties to the one nation that has shown it can discipline North Korea -- China.

Much is on the line here.

Kim's challenge is ultimately about the credibility of the United States, which has treaty commitments and issued war guarantees to scores of nations in NATO Europe, the Mideast and East Asia, but whose people have zero interest in any new war, especially a second Korean War.

If the world sees that America is reluctant to face down, or fight a North Korea that is threatening us, will they retain the old confidence that the United States will risk war for them?

What Kim is undermining is not just U.S. security but U.S. credibility.