Chomsky on North Korea's Provocations & Ours

Editor's Note: In the context of a broader discussion, M.I.T. Professor Emeritus Noam Chomsky, speaking in April in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was asked by Democracy Now news anchor Amy Goodman: "Do you think there is a possibility that the US would attack North Korea?" Chomsky's answer is instructive in view of the ongoing US/South Korean wargames off the Korean coast which now involve two US aircraft carrier battle groups.

Noam Chomsky: I doubt it very much. The reason is very simple.

An attack on North Korea would unleash … a massive artillery bombardment of Seoul, the biggest city in South Korea and right near the border, which would wipe it out including plenty of American troops. As far as I can see, there is no defense against that.

Furthermore, North Korea could retaliate against American bases in the region where there are plenty of US soldiers. They'd be devastated; North Korea would be finished; so would much of the region. But if attacked, presumably they would respond, very likely. In fact the responses might be automatic. [National Security Advisor, General Herbert Raymond] McMaster at least, and [Secretary of Defense, General James] Mattis understand this. How much influence they have, we don't know. So I think an attack is unlikely.

But the real question is: Is there a way of dealing with the problem? There are a lot of proposals. Sanctions. A big new missile defense system—which is a major threat to China and will increase tensions there. Military threats of various kinds. Sending an aircraft carrier, the [*USS Carl*] *Vinson* to North Korea…. Those are the kind of proposals as to how to solve it.

Actually there's one proposal that's ignored. It's a pretty simple proposal. Remember: the goal is to get North Korea to freeze its weapons and missiles systems.

So, one proposal is to accept their offer to do that. It sounds simple. They have made a proposal—China and North Korea—have proposed to freeze the North Korean missile and nuclear weapons systems and the US instantly rejected it. And you can't blame that on Trump. Obama did the same thing. A couple of years ago the same offer was presented, I think it was 2015, the Obama administration instantly rejected it.

And the reason is that it calls for a *quid pro quo*. It says in return the US should put an end to threatening military maneuvers on North Korea's borders, which happen to include, under Trump, sending of nuclear-capable B52s [and B1 and B2 bombers] flying right near the border.

Maybe Americans don't remember very well, but North Koreans have a memory of, not too long ago, when North Korea was absolutely flattened, literally, by American bombing. There were literally no targets left.

I really urge people who haven't done it to read the official American military histories, the *Air Quarterly Review*, the military histories describing this. They describe it very vividly and accurately. They say there just weren't any targets left. So what could we do? Well, we decided to attack the dams, the huge dams—a major war crime. People were hanged for it at Nuremberg, but put that aside. And then comes an ecstatic, gleeful description of the bombing of the dams and the huge flow of water which was wiping out valleys and destroying the rice crop, "upon which Asians depend for survival"—lots of racist comments—but all with exaltation and glee. You really have to read it to appreciate it. The North Koreans don't have to bother reading it. They lived it.

So when nuclear-capable B52s [etc.] are flying on their border, along with other threatening military maneuvers, they're kind of upset about it. Strange people. And they continue to develop what they see as a potential deterrent that might protect the regime, and the country in fact, from destruction. ...

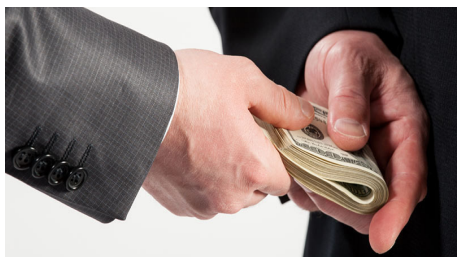
MILITARY & NUCLEAR CAPABILITY	NORTH KOREA	UNITED STATES
Active duty military personnel [1]	700,000	1.4 million
Military personnel near other state	0 [2]	28,500 in S. Korea; 50,000 in Japan
Military budget	$7.5 billion[3]	$587.8 billion[3] -to- $850 billion [4]
Number of nuclear warheads	0 confirmed, maybe 10 [5]	4,000 to 4,480 [6]
Nuclear weapon delivery systems [7]	0	450 missiles, 165 heavy bombers, [8] 12 Trident subs (1,900 total)
Number of annual military trainings carried out along the other's borders	0 [14]	2 (South Korea)
Range of usable missiles	< 2,800 miles [9]	8,000 miles [10]
Verbal threats of nuclear strike?	Lots	Lots
Pledge of "no first use" of nuclear weapons	Yes [11] (7 May 2016)	No
Number of ballistic missile tests in 2017	9 [12]	6 [10, 12]
Number of ICBM tests in 2017 [13]	0	6 [10, 12]
Previous nuclear weapons attacks	0	2
Current shooting wars initiated	0	7: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya
Civilians killed in conflicts since 2015	0 [15]	3,800-5,800 [16, 17]

Notes [1] Global Fire Power.com, 2016, http://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-comparison / [2] For a relative comparison, consider North Korean troops in Mexico or Cuba / [3] Global Fire Power.com, 2017 / [4] War Resisters League, "Where your income tax money really goes," March 2017 / [5] *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 1, 2016 / [6] Fed. of Am. Scientists, "Status of World Nuclear Forces," Apr. 4, 2017; and *Bulletin of Atomic the Scientists*, Dec. 14, 2016 / [7] A delivery system is needed to get a warhead to its target. / [8] USAirForce.com, Current Bombers, http://www.usaf.com/1bomb.htm / [9] *The Atlantic*, "This warhead is not deliverable," May 14, 2017 / [10] *Christian Science Monitor,* May 9, 2017 / [11] CNN, May 8, 2016; VOAnews.com, May 7, 2017 / [12] ABC News, May 30, 2017 / [13] An ICBM would be capable of reaching the other country's territory. /[14] For a relative comparison, in Canada or Mexico / [15] Also, zero combatants were killed. / [16] Bureau of Investigative Journalism, May 31, 2017 (This includes coalition forces.) / [17] Airwars.com, Jan. 19, 2017. ***—Nukewatch chart by Kelly Lundeen***

With Ballistic Missile Defense, There's a Secret to Success

The corporate gravy train known as Star Wars, Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD), or just Missile Defense—after having spent over $200 billion since 1983—is finally celebrating a successful test. On May 31, 2017 the Pentagon claimed that on it hit a missile shot from the Pacific with a missile shot from California.

The veracity of the claim is impossible to confirm because, as always, the military did not provide details. Actual success is highly unlikely. In 2002, Congress granted the Pentagon authority to keep key test information secret, including flight test data on all its BMD experiments. The military's blanket classification of these testing results was imposed in the face of highly embarrassing scientific evidence of test fakery, and two years after the FBI began an investigation into fraud and cover-up inside the program.



Nukewatch asked Bruce Gagnon, of the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space, if the secrecy rules are still in place. Gagnon wrote June 6: "Sure they are. Many of the tests are scripted, what [City University of New York physicist Dr.] Michio Kaku calls 'strap down rabbit tests.' They can't afford to release [details]. It would sink their boat."

Secrecy could be the only successful thing in the BMD program. It's been savaged, by independent and government scientists for over 26 years. In 1997, Professor Gordon Mitchell of the Univ. of Pittsburgh blasted "secrecy and misinformation on missile defense research," in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, arguing that the "shackles of secrecy and classification" should be removed so that scientific peer review could protect taxpayers from fraud. Mitchell wrote: "Given the lack of grave or immediate ballistic missile threat to the US … BMD research data should be presumptively public, not born secret."

One program centers on a rocket known as Standard Missile 3 or SM-3, which the Pentagon claimed in 2010 had succeeded in 84% of its tests. But Dr. Theodore Postol, an MIT physicist, and George Lewis, a Cornell physicist, studied the military's data and reported that only 10 to 20 percent of the tests worked. "The system … will intercept warheads only by accident, if ever," Postol told the *New York Times* May 18, 2010.

Postol has been exposing corruption in the scandal-ridden missile industry since the 1991 US war on Iraq. Back then, he proved that not one Patriot air defense rocket stopped a Scud missile. The Pentagon had claimed then the Patriot's success rate was 80% in Saudi Arabia and 50% in Israel.

Calling the program "delusional," Postol, Lewis, Kaku, Mitchell, Gagnon and other long-standing critics remind taxpayers that any enemy sophisticated enough to field intercontinental ballistic missiles will produce decoys and other means confounding defenses. Laura Grego, a physicist with Union of Concerned Scientists, lampooned the Pentagon's claim of a May 30 success, blogging that the military couldn't honestly say that the test had actually worked unless it had evaded real countermeasures like decoy warheads.

In 2012, the National Research Council, the nation's preeminent group of scientists, issued a 260-page report critical of the program, said current enemy "countermeasures" make the anti-missile system unworkable, and called a planned $28 billion group of satellites used to track enemy warheads "unneeded."

Even *Time* magazine scolded the program in its July 10, 2000 headline: "Missile Impossible: This week's $100 million test of the space shield is all but fixed." In June that year, 53 House Democrats asked the FBI to investigate the program for "serious allegation of fraud and cover up." The bureau later looked into allegations that the giant military contractor TRW committed fraud and a cover-up while developing a key component of the BMD system.

For a more detailed look at anti-ballistic embezzlement, ask Nukewatch for its Special Report, "Missile Defense Fraud Goes Ballistic."

—Global Network, June 6, 2017; *New York Times*, May 31, 2017, Sept. 12, 2012, & May 18, 2010; *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Aug. 26, 2001; *Extra!*, F.A.I.R., Nov. 1, 2000; *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1997