

“Deranged” Threats of Nuclear Attack Not Unique to “Dotard” Trump

Editorial

After President Donald Trump’s Sept. 23 bombast before the United Nations General Assembly, where he claimed the US might “have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea,” the North Korean regime responded quickly, calling him a “mentally deranged dotard.”

“Far from making remarks of any persuasive power that can be viewed to be helpful to defusing tension, he made unprecedented rude nonsense one has never heard from any of his predecessors,” the President Kim Jong-un said after Trump’s UN bomb threat.

In Trump’s Nov. 2017 speech to South Korea’s National Assembly, he sputtered, “I also have come here to this potential [sic] to deliver a message...” Trump’s slurred speech led the Minju Joson, a state-run newspaper published in Pyongyang, to say in an editorial that the president’s message was a “load of

rubbish spouted by the old lunatic Trump” and “was all nonsense.”

Of course the gibberish and lack of coherence in Trump’s speech was nonsense, but unprecedented in belligerence it was not. Trump’s predecessors have all been nearly as coldblooded in their overt threats against North Korea. While the oafish US president certainly speaks like a dotard, his threat to totally destroy a country of 25 million people is no more deranged than previous White House residents.

On July 12, 1993, Bill Clinton was in South Korea and warned that if the North developed and used an atomic weapon, the United States would “overwhelmingly retaliate,” adding chillingly, “It would mean the end of their country as they know it.” In 1997, a Clinton Presidential Decision Directive explicitly approved plans for “first use” of US nuclear weapons against “rogue” states.

Military Budget Still Unaudited, Unaccountable for Lost Trillions

The current fiscal year’s military budget is \$786 billion, if one includes the Dept. of Defense (\$586 billion) and the military portion from other departments (\$182 billion). This is over \$2.1 billion every day or \$87 million per hour.

Of the federal government’s discretionary spending, 55 percent goes to the military, according to Steve Lopex in the *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 2015.

Unlike federal human service and education programs that are defunded or cancelled at the first hint of fraud or mismanagement, military contractors have bilked the treasury out of hundreds of billions of tax dollars for decades and yet have barely suffered any consequences. The ballistic missile defense program is an example of decades of failure that nevertheless continues to be funded, even after spending over \$200 billion trying to hit incoming warheads moving faster than four miles-per-second. Failed tests in public schools bring demands for closings, but failed anti-missile tests are declared reasons for more billions.

“The Pentagon in 2008 spent more money every five seconds in Iraq than the average [US worker] earned in a year,” according to John Whitehead in CounterPunch Feb. 16. Whitehead, president of the Rutherford Institute, found the figures in a Nov. 12, 2010 report in BusinessInsider online by Robert Johnson and Ujala Sehgal. The report also noted that while the US makes up only 5 percent of the world’s population, it accounts for “almost 50 percent of the world’s total military expenditure—more on the military than the next 19 biggest spending nations combined.”

In 2007, Walter Pincus reported that “\$15 billion a month (roughly \$20 million an hour) is what the United States spends on foreign wars.” (*Washington Post*, Dec. 27, 2007) With the US now waging war in several more countries than they were 11 years ago, \$15 billion per month is likely a low estimate.

US shooting wars in hot areas cost small fortunes every day. “While many [US workers] can barely afford the cost of heating and cooling their own homes, the US government spends \$20 billion an-

nually just to provide air conditioning for military installations in Iraq and Afghanistan,” NPR’s All Things Considered reported June 25, 2011.

The extravagance has been partly detailed by the Project on Government Oversight. As analyzed by Whitehead, the Pentagon paid: \$71 for a metal pin that should cost just 4 cents; \$644.75 for a gear smaller than a dime that sells for \$12.51: more than a 5,100 percent increase in price; \$1,678.61 for another tiny part, also smaller than a dime, that could have been bought within the Department of Defense (DoD) for \$7.71: a 21,000 percent increase; \$71.01 for a straight, thin metal pin that the DoD had on hand, unused by the tens of thousands, for 4 cents: an increase of over 177,000 percent.

A 2011 study by the Government Accountability Office found that \$70 billion worth of cost overruns by the Pentagon were caused by management failures. Even the reserved editors at the *New York Times* asked, “What Would You Do With an Extra \$70 Billion?”

“Chaos and Uncertainty,” a study done in 2013 by Todd Harrison for the Center for Strategic & Budgetary Assessments, found it cost an average of \$2.1 million per year for every US soldier serving in Afghanistan. Management of the war system is also badly compromised, according to the *Washington Post* which reported Dec. 5, 2016: “The Pentagon buried an internal study that exposed \$125 billion in administrative waste in its business operations amid fears Congress would ... slash the defense budget.”

Reuters correspondent Scot J. Paltrow, disclosed that between 1996 and 2013, a colossal \$8.5 trillion (with a “t”) had gone unaccounted-for in the Pentagon expenditures. Paltrow’s article was titled, “Faking It: Behind the Pentagon’s Doctored Ledgers, A Running Tally of Epic Waste.”

It appears over charging and fraud by military contractors has only worsened since Sept. 10, 2001, when then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced at a news conference, “According to some estimates, we cannot track \$2.3 trillion in transactions.” Rumsfeld warned that the accounting disaster was “monumental,” and “terrifying,” adding that it would take “a period of years to sort it all out.” The next day’s World Trade Center news (9/11) buried this scandal permanently. — *JL*

George Bush continued the routine, hatefully naming North Korea part of an “axis of evil” during his 2002 State of the Union speech. Bush’s choice of the word “axis” usefully conjured images of Hitler Fascism, against which any atrocity can of course be excused.

Likewise, Barack Obama calmly threatened the North during his April 2014 visit to Seoul, saying, “We will not hesitate to use our military might to defend our allies and our way of life.” Calling the North “a pariah state that would rather starve its people than feed their hopes and dreams,” Obama alluded back to the country’s terrible 1996-1998 famine — “one of the great famines of the 20th Century” according to UN aid agencies. He conveniently neglected to recall any US responsibility for failing to provide adequate emergency food aid to the starving.

Nowadays, Trump gets rightfully condemned for making threats of mass destruction against the tiny, underdeveloped North, especially as he sits at the head of the grandest military empire in the history of the world, with 12 ballistic missile submarines, 19 aircraft carrier battle groups, 450 land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, almost 800 military bases in 70 countries and territories abroad, and shooting wars underway in seven different countries.

Yet jittery trepidation regarding phantom threats by North Korea is routinely, almost universally voiced — even if it’s just as routinely debunked. In 1996, the editors at the *New York Times* warned, “North Korea could threaten parts of Hawai‘i and Alaska” in less than 10 years. (“Star Wars, the Sequel,” May 14) Now 22 years on, the North still can’t do it. In 2000, the same editors said US intelligence agencies “predict that North Korea could have the capacity to launch a handful of nuclear-tipped long-range missiles within five years.” (“Prelude to a Missile Defense,” Dec. 19) Eighteen years later, it still can’t.

Fearmongering about North Korea always lacks any evidence that its ruling regime is suicidal, because there is no such evidence. Never explained by our military-industrial-Congressional weapons merchants, newspaper and TV pundits, or think tank analysts, is why the North would precipitate its inevitable self-destruction by attacking the United States or its allies, because it never would.

A few reporters have managed to fit this acknowledgment into their stories, and for this they need to be recognized. Jessica Durando, writing in USA Today Nov. 21, 2017, said North Korea’s leader appears “determined to keep his nuclear arsenal to deter a US attempt to overthrow him.”

And journalist Loretta Napoleoni, author of the brand new “North Korea: The Country We Love to Hate” (2018, University of Western Australia Press), spoke to the London Express Feb. 20, saying about the North’s arsenal of 10 to 12 unusable nuclear bombs: “I don’t think they have any intention to use it. It is a deterrent,” Napoleoni said, “and very much what they wanted to achieve in order to make sure that nobody would attack them ever again.”

In view of the just-announced joint US/South Korean military invasion rehearsals known as “exercises” now set for April, North Korea is the place for legitimate trepidation.

Trump’s Budget Increases Nuclear Arms Work

In keeping with the Trump Administration’s recent controversial Nuclear Posture Review, the new Fiscal Year 2019 federal budget, issued by the White House Feb. 12, dramatically ramps up nuclear weapons research and production. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the Department of Energy’s semiautonomous nuclear weapons agency, is receiving a \$2.2 billion overall boost to \$15.1 billion—17% more than FY 2018. Of the total, a full \$11 billion is for the budget category “Weapons Activities” [i.e. nuclear weapons], a full 18% above FY 2018. Digging deeper under Weapons Activities, “Directed Stockpile Work” is increased 41% from \$3.3 billion to \$4.7 billion. DSW is the hands-on, nuts and bolts operations that include extending the operational service of current nuclear weapons for up to 60 years, while also retrofitting them with new military capabilities. — *Nuclear Watch New Mexico*



Air conditioners cool tents on a US military base in Iraq where temp’s can reach 125°F. Photo: Steven Anderson