

Written by John Hallam
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NORTH KOREAN CONFRONTATION COULD END IN CATASTROPHE UNLESS THERE IS AN OUTBREAK OF SANITY

Absent a sudden outbreak of sanity, there seems to be ample opportunity for the cruise of the Carl Vinson to the Korean Peninsula to end in catastrophe. This does not of course mean that it is in any way certain that it WILL do so: A range of outcomes are possible that range from the merely anticlimactic to the utterly apocalyptic. Let us pray that what actually takes place over the next few days is anticlimactic not apocalyptic. But there is opportunity enough for it to be apocalyptic. Lets just explore the awful options.

It is clear that the DPRK is poised to do an underground nuclear test. It seems quite likely that it will do it on the 'day of the sun', which happens to be Saturday – the day after tomorrow.

It is less clear that Trump may intend to prevent that test by an attack on DPRK underground nuclear test facilities, (how do you attack an underground nuclear test facility? Its underground.), or missile launch facilities. 'May' is here the operative word, as there are rather a lot of reasons as to why the consequences of this might be catastrophic. Not that the DPRK would ultimately 'win' a conflict with the US – it clearly would be leveled – but before the DPRK was leveled it might be able to:

--Carry out a massive conventional attack on Seoul. Its almost certain that it would be able to do this, as it has more than 10,000 artillery pieces pre-positioned to do just this. There is no practical way to prevent it from doing so.

So assuming Trump targets the DPRK test facilities, at least, a massive artillery bombardment of Seoul looks probable.

--Carry out nuclear strikes on other relatively nearby targets (within roughly 1500Km), including Japan (US forces or possibly Tokyo), obviously again on Seoul, and possibly also on Beijing or Shanghai.

These, should the DPRK be able to successfully and accurately launch its missiles as distinct from having them blow up on launch, would be roughly Hiroshima-size warheads (10-20Kt), but

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employed against cities such as Shanghai, Beijing or Tokyo would still rack up a body – count of 100,000-500,000, depending on the fuzing characteristics of the warhead. (whether it exploded at ground level or 1000m in the air.).

Presumably what would happen next would be the incineration of the DPRK by the US or maybe China, with a body count in the millions or tens of millions, and with the fallout drifting over South Korea, China, and Japan.

Of course, the DPRK MIGHT be unable to launch anything either because its missiles plain faed to function, or because the Vinson task force successfully destroyed them. Might. But again, might not. And even if one or two warheads reached their intended targets, and exploded as they are designed to do, we would be contemplating a body count of 100-500,000 each if used on cities (less, used on military facilities), and probable US retaliation with who knows what ongoing consequences from China and Russia.

Finally it is just possible that the DPRK might manage to successfully explode a warhead on or near the US Carl Vinson itself.

A few more complicating factors are there.

--South Korea is going to the polls Saturday, with victory likely for a candidate who favors reconciliation with the DPRK.

--I mentioned that the test site is underground. This does mean that an attack on it might not prevent a test. It also likely that the imminence of an attack might mean that the test was performed a number of hours early.

There are clearly all sorts of permutations and combinations to these extremely unappealing and potentially catastrophic possibilities. Its entirely possible that US attacks on the DPRK might result in little if any retaliation at all. Its entirely possible that nothing much will happen. Let us hope.

The options in which nothing much happens at least for now include:

--The DPRK does not test. That currently looks unlikely, but its possible.

--The US makes no particular reaction to a test that does take place. This is more probable (why burn down the stable after the horse has bolted), but would be seen as a defeat of sorts by

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Trump.

Both Trump and Kim Jong Un seem to be on trajectories that make any kind of peaceful resolution unlikely. Unless the trajectories change.

Note also that Kim Jong Un has seemingly ordered the immediate evacuation of Pyongyang (according to one media outlet).

The Chinese have assembled roughly 150,000 troops along the border.

On wonders if anyone has had the commonsense to walk Donald Trump through these ghastly options.

The destruction of the DPRK is not of course, literally, in and of itself, the end of the world. The ability to bring that about belongs to the US and Russia, who have the unique capability to render the planet uninhabitable in roughly 45minutes. We are not yet at that point.

Nor, I should emphasise, are we at the point where the DPRK can (yet) hit the US mainland with a nuclear warhead. The scenarios in which the DPRK explodes an 'EMP weapon' in space above the continental US. Plunging it into medieval times are for the moment fanciful, though China and Russia can certainly do so and it is taken for granted that should WW-III ever break out, this would be their opening gambit – as it is for the US itself. For the DPRK, the ability to hit even a west coast city with a Hiroshima size warhead is 2-5 years away.

The use of ANY nuclear weapons – even the DPRKs Hiroshima-sized ones, let alone much much larger US or Chinese nukes – would cross a threshold no one has been crazy enough to cross since 1945. The use of even a single small warhead in what would be the third ever use of a nuclear weapon in anger, would mean that thenceforth we live in a world in which nuclear use is possible.

The world will be changed forever if that takes place.

Of course it does not need to happen. All of this is eminently 'evitable'.

We just need an outbreak of commonsense in the next few days. Those concerned need to step back and contemplate the potential consequences of their actions.

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And then, hopefully, a week on from this piece I'll look back and see that nothing much transpired from the Carl Vinson's tour, and the world, more or less as I am used to it, is still here. Lets hope so.

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