

North Korea is a Danger

by Michael Curtis



When a man knows he is to be hanged, said Dr. Samuel Johnson, it concentrates his mind wonderfully. When North Korea on March 6, 2017 simultaneously and successfully fired four missiles the mind of the President of the U.S. as well as the eyes of the world began concentrating on the danger to humanity. That demonstration of power together with the murder on February 13, 2017 of Kim Jong Nam, by two women on behalf of the victim's half-brother, the dictator, Kim Jong-Un, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Malaysia, constituted, for many, a wake-up call and a "game-changer."

Yet it should not have been, The "international community" was given ample notice of the nature of the North Korean regime. In a damning 372 page report of February 7, 2014 by a United Nation committee headed by Michael Kirby, former Australian High Court Justice, the violations of human rights and abuses

of the regime were considered to constitute crimes against humanity. North Korea is a totalitarian state, with a single party, a dictator who is the Supreme Leader, and a guiding ideology, seeking to dominate every aspect of the lives of its citizens who are terrorized.

After World War II the frequent feeble excuse of those who were passive in the face of Nazi atrocities was "If only we had known." There is no excuse possible about the North Korean system. Indeed, the Kirby report indicated that atrocities committed by North Korea (NK) were strikingly similar to those perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II. There is no parallel in the contemporary world.

Those atrocities included torture, public executions, a large political prison system, thousands of political prisoners killed in the past 50 years, abduction, enforced disappearance of people, arbitrary detention, entrenched patterns of discrimination especially against women, the blocked use of food for ideological reasons, a bad food situation in which more than a quarter of children were born stunted, all making up a regime responsible for multiple crimes against humanity.

In the system, one based on the cult of personality, there has been almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. One consequence has been the flight of at least 30,000 refugees into South Korea. Although the Kirby Report suggested the UN take judicial proceedings against the regime, nothing was done.

The time has come for the world to ensure, as Ambassador Nikki Haley said, that NK does not continue on its destructive path. Even more urgent, the US must ensure that its ability to defend against NK ballistic missiles is enhanced.

The urgency results from the events on March 6, 2017, when NK launched its remarkably accurate four missiles simultaneously from its long range rocket launch site. They flew 620 miles

and fell into the sea, between Japan's northwest coast and the Korean Peninsula. This was ominous for three reasons: first, the regime indicated they could have struck at US bases in Japan; secondly, because of the saturation element, Japan could not shoot down all four launched at the same time; thirdly, each of 26 missile launches and the five successful nuclear tests showed an increase in yield. NK is ready to annihilate its enemies. The intercontinental ballistic missile, on which it is working, may be capable of reaching the U.S.

The tests could also have been a distraction for the murder of Kim Jong Un, as a result of which the Malaysian government expelled the NK Ambassador from the country. Paradoxically, the embassy had been set up in February 2004, and Malaysia was the first country whose citizens could enter NK without a visa, which was reciprocated by NK.

Three weeks earlier, NK deliberately tested a medium range missile during the visit of Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe to the White House. The US, aware of the NK provocations, is holding the joint military exercise between the US and South Korea, known as Foal Eagle. This involves 320,000 troops, highly technical firepower, and aircraft including the F-35 plane. But though NK considers this as preparation for a pre-emptive strike for a future invasion, for the US it is a defensive operation.

The defense is being enhanced by the beginning of deployment of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) an anti-missile defense system, being put in South Korea. The system is supposed to be completely deployed by the end of 2017. China is opposed to this system arguing that it is destroying the regional security balance, and that it might be the main target of this radar system, a contention denied by the U.S.

Unfortunately at this moment South Korea is engulfed in a political crisis due to the decision of the Constitutional

Court to uphold the impeachment of its President Park Geun-hye and ordered her removal from office as a result of charges of corruption and cronyism on behalf of a friend who pressured companies, including Samsung, to give millions to foundations she controlled. Park is the first president to be forced from office, though not the first to be impeached.

China may be the key since it has influence over Pyongyang. The country is unhappy with the NK missile and nuclear tests. It has advocated denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and has called for United Nations sanctions against NK. It has already in February 2017 suspended coal imports from NK. China's foreign minister, Wany Yi, sensing the danger to his country, calls for NK to suspend its nuclear program while the US and South Korea should end their military exercises.

Irrespective of the troubling trade issue between the US and China the present impasse is an opportunity to consider some kind of political rapprochement together with Japan in order to remove the NK threat.

President Trump has an opportunity for decisive action and a first international triumph. This is not military action, though defensive preparation must be continued, but for political and diplomatic activity including sanctions to press the reluctant international community to hold North Korea accountable and to be punished not only for its crimes against humanity and its coercion of its citizens, but because it is the danger to the peace of the world.