



**Statement Before the  
Senate Committee on Armed Services**

***“Situation on the Korean Peninsula and U.S.  
Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region”***

A Testimony by:

**Dr. Michael J. Green**

Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS

Director of Asian Studies and Chair in Modern and Contemporary  
Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy, the Edmund A. Walsh School of  
Foreign Service, Georgetown University

**January 30, 2018**

**216 Hart Senate Office Building**

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee on the Trump administration's broader "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and the rising danger posed by North Korean nuclear proliferation.

In my view the administration is to be commended for articulating a strategic framework for the Asia-Pacific region that recognizes great power competition with China and the importance of solidifying our alliances and partnerships with maritime democracies. However, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific framework still suffers from two major shortcomings. The first is the administration's complete retreat on trade, which puts American agriculture exporters at risk as our partners negotiate new access agreements in the region without us --and our strategic influence at risk as China fills the vacuum we have created with their own initiatives like the "Belt and Road."

The second and more immediate challenge is North Korea's rapid development and deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. The Hwasong-15 missile tested last year is a road-mobile, solid-fueled intercontinental missile that ranges the United States and would be extremely difficult to detect and pre-emptively destroy in a crisis scenario. CIA Director Mike Pompeo has indicated that the North may be months away from deploying nuclear warheads capable of surviving re-entry into the atmosphere when launched on the Hwasong-15.

For 25 years Republican and Democratic administrations have tried to contain the North Korean nuclear weapons program with a combination of calibrated pressure and engagement. The quantity and quality of the North Korean nuclear and missile capability will no longer allow business as usual.

First, North Korea will likely use nuclear blackmail against the United States as a shield for increased coercion and intimidation comparable to the 2010 attacks on the South Korean corvette *Cheonan* in order decouple us from our allies and force Seoul to make concessions and perhaps one day capitulate.

Second, North Korea will be tempted to transfer their capability to other dangerous actors in pursuit of cash or leverage against the United States, as Pyongyang did in 2007 when it helped Syria build the El Kibar reactor before the Israeli Air Force destroyed that facility.

Third, some argue that Japan or South Korea may question the viability of our nuclear umbrella and be tempted to consider nuclear proliferation.

Diplomacy is not going to solve this problem for us. Dialogue with North Korea will probably become necessary in terms of clarifying positions, managing crises and gathering intelligence, but I could not tell you a realistic formula under which North Korea abandons its programs even with significantly increased pressure.

The administration knows this, which is why we hear talk of preventive war and now a "bloody nose" strategy designed to force Pyongyang to back down. I do not think preventive military action is going to solve this problem for us either, though. It is possible that Pyongyang would

retreat and capitulate after a U.S. military strike, but we have not tested that proposition since the Korean War and most North Korea analysts would tell you that Kim Jong-un would have to strike back. Escalation to nuclear, biological or chemical weapons by the North would mean a conflict that goes from tens of thousands killed to millions.

Put another way, the preventive use of military force is likely to make the dangers associated with the North's nuclear and ballistic missile programs *worse*. Even the talk of preventive military action is driving South Korea closer to China and having the perverse effect of accelerating Pyongyang's goal of decoupling us from one of our key allies. Military escalation would increase the likelihood that North Korea transfers nuclear capabilities to a dangerous third state. Should North Korea strike back at Japan or South Korea and survive, the manifest failure of deterrence on our part would make those allies more likely to consider their own nuclear weapons.

I cannot imagine a Situation Room meeting in which the Principals decide that these risks are more "tolerable" than the risks associated with a strategy of containing and deterring North Korea. I suspect the administration has not fully weighed those options because they are in the mode of maximizing pressure on North Korea in the hope of attaining a diplomatic breakthrough. They may be right that dropping the option of a preventive military strike would weaken U.S. leverage at this point. Eventually, however, they will confront the reality that neither diplomacy nor war will solve this problem and they will have to focus on a new strategy to reduce the dangers.

The elements of this new strategy are clear:

- Enhance and expand the robust financial sanctions introduced in September, to include the application of secondary sanctions against Chinese or other firms assisting North Korea;
- Engage in maritime interdiction operations (MIO) against ships we are already tracking in order to contain inward and potential outward proliferation by North Korea;
- Increase bilateral and regional missile defense cooperation with our allies;
- Reboot our relationship with Seoul by sending an ambassador and avoiding gratuitous trade friction;
- Address shortfalls in ammunition, readiness and joint exercises so that military options are credible should they become necessary;
- Update our counter-provocation strategies with South Korea to ensure prompt and decisive responses to North Korean attempts at coercion;
- Increase diplomatic, economic and military pressure to deter third states from becoming potential customers for North Korea;
- Engage in diplomacy with North Korea as one line of effort, but not with the expectation it will yield decisive results and not at the cost of implementing these other elements of deterrence and containment;
- Increase intelligence support.

This approach involves an increased U.S. tolerance for risk compared with the past, but that level of risk is more tolerable and appropriate than either passive deterrence or preventive war. The strategy is less likely to break American alliances or credibility and would better position the United States to implement an effective Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy to deal with the larger tectonic shift we face as Chinese power and ambitions grow.