

North Korea's Understandable Fears

Official Washington is in full-throated fury over a new North Korean nuclear test, but fails to note that North Koreans face a vast array of U.S./South Korean military might, including potential U.S. nuclear weapons, writes James Bradley.

By James Bradley

North Korea carried out its fifth nuclear test on Friday, drawing condemnation from President Obama and a charge from the Pentagon that the test was a "serious provocation." Ho-hum, here we go again.

Every year, America pays its vassal-state South Korea huge sums of U.S. taxpayer money to mount 300,000-man-strong military "games" that threaten North Korea. North Koreans view images that never seem to make it to U.S. kitchen tables: hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of U.S. armaments swarming in from the sea, hundreds of tanks and thousands of troops – their turrets and rifles pointed north – and nuclear-capable U.S. warplanes screaming overhead.

But when a young dictator straight out of central casting responds to U.S. threats with an underground test on North Korea's founding day, it's the number-one story on the front page of the *New York Times*.

Let's connect some dots. Washington and their note takers in the American press constantly tell us that crazies in Pyongyang and Tehran are nuclear threats. The misplaced, but easily sold, fears of the "North Korean missile threat" and the "Iran missile threat" allows the Pentagon to install "defensive" missile systems in South Korea and Eastern Europe which actually amount to offensive systems targeting Beijing and Moscow (by making first strikes against China and Russia more feasible).

We need to look beyond the simplistic, race-based cartoon-like scaremongering to see that far more reality-based and frightening is the nuclear threat posed by the United States.

President Obama – the Nobel Prize winner who pledged to lead a nuclear-free world – has committed over \$1 trillion dollars to modernize America's nuclear arsenal. Almost unreported by the press, we have been spending a bundle to make nukes "usable," by miniaturizing them. And to top it off, Obama has maintained a "first use" option for the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Forget the tin-pot dictator with a bad crew-cut who leads an impoverished country. Here's for some really scary reading:

Obama's Trillion-Dollar Nuclear-Arms Train Wreck

Obama plans to retain first-use nuclear option

New U.S. Nuclear Bomb Moves Closer to Full-Scale Production

THAAD: A Major Security Risk for the ROK

James Bradley is author of several bestsellers including *Flyboys* and *Flags of Our Fathers*. His most recent book is *The China Mirage: The Hidden History of American Disaster in Asia*.

Netanyahu's Land-Grab Strategy

Behind the smokescreen of the broader Mideast chaos, Israel pursues a strategy of gobbling up Palestinian lands to establish de facto control of the West Bank while confining indigenous Arabs to isolated cantons, explains Alon Ben-Meir.

By Alon Ben-Meir

Israel's continued settlement activity – whether retroactively approving “unauthorized” outposts or advancing plans for new units as was recently announced – represents yet another nail in the coffin of the peace process. The settlements have become nothing but Israel's self-entrapment, threatening its very existence.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition partners, however, are not concerned about the prospective dire repercussions of settlement activity. They put the sanctity of the land above any other consideration, and view the settlement enterprise as the prerequisite to *repossessing the entire historic “land of Israel.”*

Netanyahu is not deterred by the criticism and condemnation from the international community. He takes the position that building new housing units is largely in settlements that will eventually be part of a final status deal in exchange for land swaps, as if he has the right to unilaterally decide which settlements will be incorporated to Israel proper without an agreement with the Palestinians.

As he sees it, Israel has been building settlements for nearly five decades, and in spite of that it has not suffered any adverse consequences for its defiance of the international consensus against the settlements. Why should he worry about it now, when the international community is preoccupied with so many other

conflicts in the Middle East and is unlikely to take any punitive measure against Israel other than expressing the usual indignation?

Netanyahu is even less concerned about the Palestinians' claim that Israel's creeping annexation of their territory creates irreversible facts on the ground that would deny them a state of their own under a two-state solution.

Netanyahu counters this argument by repeating his slogan that Israel is prepared to enter negotiations unconditionally, and that the settlements do not represent any obstacle to peace. In the same breath, however, he publicly and repeatedly states that the Jews have an inalienable historic right to the entire "land of Israel," especially the West Bank. As such, he asserts, Israel is not an occupying power and has the inherent right to establish settlements on any part of its historic land.

Divided Arabs

Netanyahu is also not bothered by the reaction of the Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, as on the surface settlement activity puts them on the defensive precisely when they are reaching out to Israel.

This is not the case, Netanyahu insists. The Arab states are more concerned about Islamic radicalization and in particular the prospective Iranian nuclear threat. In fact, he claims the Arab states are seeking cooperation with Israel in spite of ongoing settlement expansion. They share a common cause with Israel and are focused on their own problems, viewing the Palestinians as nothing but an added burden.

Netanyahu's message to the Israelis, especially the settlers, is that the construction of illegal outposts will retroactively be legalized, thereby signaling that they can continue this practice with impunity.

It takes Netanyahu's typical chutzpah to call for demolishing Palestinian villages like Susiya and other housing units *built on their own land* while retroactively legalizing *illegal* Jewish settlements on Palestinian land that were expropriated by Israel, which is nothing less than a travesty.

What message does that send to the international community, and how does that square with Israel's presumed moral standing among the community of nations? This does not seem to bother him in the least.

Netanyahu dismisses the prospect that his policy would inadvertently lead to one state, as Israel will then face two choices: one, maintain its democratic form of government by granting the Palestinians full citizenship, but in the process lose its Jewish majority and its national identity as a Jewish state; or two,

deny the Palestinians citizenship, whereby Israel becomes a de-facto apartheid state, reviled and potentially sanctioned by the international community.

This, however, is not how Netanyahu and company see it. From their perspective, settling a million Jews in Israel will indeed create irreversible facts on the ground, but this is precisely what they want to realize as that would not translate to giving Palestinians Israeli citizenship and equal political rights.

Confining the Palestinians

What Netanyahu has in mind is for the Palestinians to establish their own cantons in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jenin, Jericho, and other cities, governing themselves as they see fit as long as they accept their lot quietly while Israel maintains overall security throughout the West Bank.

In so doing, Israel will indefinitely remain in control of the West Bank, managing the conflict on a day-to-day basis and dealing with Palestinian violence as it occurs. For him, a state of constant tension is preferred over relinquishing the land.

Netanyahu, however, is totally blinded by his messianic mission, ruling out the possibility that the Palestinians will sooner than later rise, as they are willing to die because they have little left to lose.

In the illuminating new book *The Suicide of the Jews* (a must read), the futurist Tsvi Bisk describes how the various Zionist branches rationalized the occupation and eventual annexation of all Palestinian land because they truly believe "that compromise on the land issue would not only endanger Jewish redemption but the redemption of all humanity. ... For religious Zionists, fidelity to the land was a divine directive and even talk about dividing the land with another people was sacrilegious."

Netanyahu is a willing hostage to coalition partners *he* assembled that include staunch proponents of the settlements, such as Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman.

Leave it to him to *use* his coalition government to provide him with the perfect excuse to continue with his policy; tragically, he is inviting disaster by putting the land above Israel's national security, if not its very existence.

Repeated polls strongly suggest that a vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians want to end their conflict based on a two-state solution. Yet, as long as the opposition political parties cannot unite with a specific and coherent political framework based on the Arab Peace Initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Likud may well form the next government in 2019.

Likewise, as long as the Palestinians remain divided, with many of their leaders steeped in corruption, they play directly into Netanyahu's hand. *They*, more than anyone else, will destroy their own prospect of realizing a statehood.

To be sure, unless Israel's opposition parties coalesce and create a popular movement for peace, and the Palestinians organize their political affairs and negotiate with Israel in unison, it may well be too late to save them both from their own self-inflicted deadly wounds.

Dr. Alon Ben-Meir is a professor of international relations at the Center for Global Affairs at NYU. He teaches courses on international negotiation and Middle Eastern studies. alon@alonben-meir.com Web: www.alonben-meir.com

Donald Trump Is Us

Pundits like to pretend that Donald Trump is some strange aberration in the American political-media process, but he is more like the illogical but logical result of a repudiation of rational thought, writes ethics professor Daniel C. Maguire.

By Daniel C. Maguire

Modern presidential election campaigns are exercises in mind-shrinkage. The failings and mischiefs of the candidates monopolize our attention and lies flourish like a toxic algae bloom. We start looking through the wrong end of the telescope and miss the big picture of what our human situation is.

Dare to take a reality break and face just two big lies beclouding this campaign. First the *big Republican lie*; then the *big Democratic lie*.

The first big lie grips both political parties but Republicans billow it into a delusion of epic and existential proportions. It is that "all is well with our planet; there is nothing that is wrong that a little of our technical grit and genius cannot take care of." Science demurs.

To avoid nearly unimaginable catastrophe on this fragile planet even the most hopeful scientists, like the Swedish Johann Rockstrom, say that we have "no more than 25-30 years to transition away from a fossil-fuel world economy." What are the odds of that?

Clive Hamilton reports that "the reluctant conclusion of the most eminent

climate scientists is that the world is now on a path to a very unpleasant future and it is too late to stop it," as he writes this in his tellingly entitled book, *Requiem For a Species*.

We cannot look at the sun for long. When reality gets too painful and unbearably bright, we avert our eyes. But let's hear it for the military, the same military that counseled caution before our mad, destabilizing plunge into Iraq and Afghanistan arranged by George W. Bush's coterie of erstwhile draft-dodgers.

Military analysts are talking climate change as a prime "national security" issue. Small wonder; a lot of their island and coastal naval bases are on the brink of inundation. Also, the military appreciate "the chain of causation" from climate change disasters to the destabilization of nation states and the rise of new forms of terrorism.

The DOD's 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review called climate change an "accelerant of instability" and a "threat multiplier." The National Academy of Sciences in 2015 noted that climate change fueled the beginning of Syria's civil war. Longer-lasting and more severe droughts, combined with government refusal to deal with crop failures and livestock deaths, set the stage for the current chaos.

As noted in *Scientific American* (June 2016), all of this "pushed hundreds of thousands of people to migrate from their farms into cities like Aleppo and Raqqa." The resultant turmoil "turned to civil war" and "that civil war allowed ISIS to rise terrorizing the world."

Similarly in northern Nigeria "deforestation, overgrazing and increased heat from global warming have turned what was once productive farmland and savanna into an extension of the Sahara Desert." Again *Scientific American*: "The chain of causation from climate change to desertification, to food insecurity, to migration and then to conflict fueled Boko Haram's rise."

The Republicans boast of their "national security" credentials. But many of these same Republicans and all climate-change deniers are the descendants of "Flat Earth" insanity; they ignore, in a feat of denial tinged with psychosis, the greatest threat to national and global security in the recent history of the planet.

The Long View

A little bit of history cleanses the mind. Ten thousand years ago, after the 2½ million years of the Pleistocene era, which was dominated by spreading glaciers, the earth's orbital pattern, which wobbles and tilts erratically, took a happy turn and we entered into the milder Holocene epoch. This was like leaving

Purgatory and entering into the Garden of Eden.

Our species first appeared around 200,000 years ago during the unfriendly Pleistocene age. However, 65,000 years before the Pleistocene ended, humans had been reduced by Pleistocene's hostile climate to just 15,000 fertile adults huddled together in the hills of what we now call Ethiopia. But, enter the gentler Holocene and we had liberating alternatives to the rigors of hunting and gathering. Agriculture was born.

The arrival of the Holocene was welcome relief but it was also a time bomb. In the glow of primeval affluence, we became more fertile. From an original few hundred of our species, we have passed the seven billion mark and put stresses on the planet that it cannot bear.

We have trashed the Holocene epoch and have entered what is now called the Anthropocene (from the Greek *anthropoi*, people), i.e., a new era in which humans are directly affecting and changing the earth's climate. In other words, people-power is now wrecking the environmental security created by the Holocene's climate and rushing us to disaster.

At this crucial moment, the Republican Party is the only party in the "developed" world that consists mainly of climate-change deniers – chief among them, Donald Trump, its presidential candidate.

But he is far from alone. Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma became the symbol and spokesman for the party when in the winter of 2015 he brought a snowball into the Senate chamber to illustrate the hoax of climate change.

Because Inhofe could see so much in a snowball, the Republicans made him chairman of the U.S. Senate's Committee on the Environment.

Now, the Republican Party has put global-warming denial at the top of their presidential ticket. President Obama may say the effects of global warming are "terrifying," but Trump says anthropogenic global warming is a hoax.

Though these head-in-the-sand denials may leave scientists shaking their heads in dismay, the denials have had an effect on the political thinking of many Americans who have pushed global warming down the list of priorities. Even at the 2015 Paris conference on climate change, we and the rest of the world could not agree on *enforceable* ways of doing anything realistic about the problem.

The Democratic Dodge

So, in fairness, let it be said, many Democrats are anything but enlightened and alert on ecological needs. But on top of that they are indulging in a

specialized lie. The Democratic liberal narrative is that Donald Trump is the crude and explicit incarnation of what the Republicans have become since xenophobia and racism were ushered into Republicanism by Richard Nixon with his "Southern strategy."

But that suggests that the rest of us have a kind of moral purity that distances us from Trumpism, which is not really true. *Trump is also us*. No alien is he in this America. Our soil is receptive to the wild seeds he sows. That's why nervous Democrats fear a silent majority out there who won't put Trump signs on their lawns but will vote him into the White House.

List Trumps brazen sins and we have a mirror image of ourselves:

–Xenophobia and racism? Don't miss the message sent by all our wars of choice over the past half century or so in which kill-power held primacy of place among the power options. From conventional war to convenient drones (the dream weapon of risk-avoidance warriors), we wreak death and destruction on non-white people from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia all the way to Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Pakistan, and Syria.

We would not inflict such indiscriminate "shock and awe" on Sweden no matter what tensions arose. Laos, Iraq? No problem.

For a quick check on our xenophobic racism, just ask African-Americans, the perennial orphans of American conscience, how out-of-step Donald Trump's "whiteness crusade" is in this brutally divided and color-coded nation.

–Sexism? Trump doesn't trump us there. If salaries signal socially assigned worth, we treat women as of lesser value just as he does. In a presidential race, put an intelligent woman up against an ignorant male buffoon who is also a crooked, bankruptcy-prone businessman, and you've got a cliff-hanger.

Trump has a particular pick on Muslims, but our moral concern for occupied and oppressed Muslims in Palestine/Israel is not in evidence even in the liberal press, although we help finance and arm Israel's occupation. That criminal occupation, metastasizing under the euphemism of "settlements," is more vicious than simply "banning Muslims;" it imprisons them and their children on site.

–Trump's penchant for blunt military solutions to delicate problems is reflected in our embarking on repeated killing missions without the constitutionally required formal declaration of war, which hasn't happened since December 1941. In its stead, we get cowardly resolutions to transfer war-making decisions to the imperial president. Will it take an erratic impulsive President Trump to show the stupidity of that congressional defection?

Remember, too, that budgets are windows into the soul. With all military-related expenses factored in, our budget pours around \$30,000 a second into military maintenance, preparations, debt and research while our infrastructure and schools crumble. (Professor Robert McChesney reports that actual military spending is over \$1 trillion a year.)

Trump specializes in embarrassingly fact-free pronouncements but the disgraceful political illiteracy of our electorate is unmatched among other democracies. That's why his lies and falsehoods pass muster with large segments of the population.

No, Trump is not some alien being that somehow took over the Republican Party and now is running even in polls predicting who will be the next U.S. president. He is just the newest avatar of the famous saying by Walt Kelly's Pogo character, "we have met the enemy and he is us."

Daniel C. Maguire is a Professor of Moral Theology at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit institution in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is author of *A Moral Creed for All Christians* and *The Horrors We Bless: Rethinking the Just-War Legacy [Fortress Press]*. He can be reached at daniel.maguire@marquette.edu
