

OPINION

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America and Korea are Part of the Same Threat

Trump, Kim and the nuclear status quo

BY ROBERT C. KOEHLER

I get the skepticism regarding the tentative nuclear disarmament agreement the president



and Kim Jong-un reached two weeks ago, but not the cynicism — not the outright dismissal.

It's too easy to hate Trump, but he isn't the point. In his reckless unpredictability — in his lust for applause and desperation to steal headlines from the Robert Mueller investigation — he snatched an opportunity to meet with the leader of North Korea . . . “Little Rocket Man” . . . and talk about reducing the danger of nuclear war. Say what?

It hardly seems possible — but maybe Trump has a mission far beyond anything he himself envisions: visiting creative destruction, you might say, on the planet's geopolitical infrastructure, loosening the certainties of nationalism and armed self-defense. Perhaps the salvation of Planet Earth begins with cluelessness and ego: a superpower leader who has no idea what he's doing.

“It is unclear if President Trump knew the full implications of accepting a meeting with Kim or the fact that a direct meeting with the leader of the United States was a prize three generations in the mak-

ing,” Alexandra Bell, senior policy director at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, wrote recently in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists newsletter.

“It is also unclear if President Trump had a grand design for a nuclear agreement with North Korea in mind all along, or if he was equally willing to go to war.

“Regardless of the underlying impetus, the president has shown he is not encumbered by the foreign policy status quo or it would seem, congressional oversight. Because of his unprecedented actions — coupled with a few essential variables, including Kim's confidence in his nuclear deterrent and South Korean President Moon Jae-in's commitment to diplomacy — there is now an opportunity to forge a real and lasting nuclear agreement.”

What happens next won't be simple. It will take long-term negotiating skill along with extraordinary honesty, goodwill and public awareness — indeed, public demand, public prayer — that transcends the limits of geopolitical expertise . . . “the foreign policy status quo” that assumes the necessity of war and regards peace as an impossibility except as it is enforced by Western dominance.

Julian Borger, for instance, reflects the status quo animosity toward the Trump-Kim accord in a recent piece in *The Guardian*. “Many arms control advocates,” he writes, “. . . argue that negoti-

ations with North Korea that are not directly aimed at the speedy dismantling of its rogue nuclear weapons programme would give it legitimacy and send the wrong message to other regimes contemplating whether to build their own bomb.”

Subtle certainties of Western dominance resonate in this sentence. These are “regimes” we're dealing with here, not actual governments. And oh my, we need a speedy dismantling of North Korea's “rogue nuclear weapons” program.

I hadn't been aware that there was an official distinction between approved nukes and renegade nukes and somehow doubt that the Marshall Islanders or Americans who live near the Nevada Test Site — not to mention the hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — take comfort in the fact that their radiation-induced cancer, their shattered lives, their lost loved ones were the result of legitimate nuclear testing and use.

The statement also implies that North Korea developed its nuclear weapons program — no small feat for a tiny, impoverished country — out of sheer orneriness and evil (unlike us), and Trump's conferring legitimacy on it through give-and-take negotiations will only encourage other evil regimes to go nuclear.

There seems to be a huge media memory void surrounding North Korea — and the U.S. role in shaping its defense strategy. In

2002, notes Reese Erlich at *Common Dreams*, George W. Bush “declared North Korea to be part of the ‘Axis of Evil,’ which also included Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Korea feared it could be the next target for regime change. The DPRK withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and began a sprint towards developing a nuclear weapon.”

But the memory void goes half a century deeper than that: back to the Korean War, when the United States dropped 635,000 tons of explosives on North Korea, including 32,557 tons of napalm, destroying cities, farmland and hydroelectric dams, and killed as many as 3 million people. Even more might have died if Gen. Douglas MacArthur had gotten his way and the U.S. had used nuclear weapons.

The nuclear threat didn't end with the armistice in 1953. By 1958, President Eisenhower had begun shipping atomic weapons to South Korea and by the mid-'60s “the United States had more than 900 nuclear artillery shells, tactical bombs, surface-to-surface rockets and missiles, anti-aircraft missiles and nuclear land mines in South Korea,” according to Walter Pincus, writing in the *New York Times*. The nukes stayed in South Korea till 1991; their threat understandably shaped the country's strategic thinking.

This is not a defense of North Korea, just an expansion of the

context in which we evaluate the current situation. Over seven decades of murderous contempt for this tiny, communist country, we helped create it.

In terms of world peace, both countries are part of the same threat. Indeed, the U.S. Congress just approved a new defense budget: \$716 billion for the Pentagon, up \$80 billion from last year, and an additional \$21.6 billion for nuclear weapons programs. This includes, according to the recent Nuclear Posture Review, the development of “flexible” — low-yield, usable — nuclear weapons.

Military thinking controls the United States, just as it does North Korea. Both countries have rogue nuclear weapons programs. Real peace negotiations would include members of the global public who want to transcend any possibility of nuclear war and would have the courage to bring up Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which the United States signed in 1970:

“Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

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Has Slavery Really Ended or Just Transformed?

The racial disparities are stark

BY JESSICAH PIERRE

During the week of June 19, cities around the country mark Juneteenth — the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in the United States.

Dating back to 1865, two and a half years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, this holiday marks the day when Union soldiers landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the Civil War had ended and the enslaved were now free. They were the last people freed from slavery after the war.

In much of the country, howev-



er, mass incarceration has picked up where slavery left off.

Over 150 years after the first Juneteenth, the United States incarcerates more of its citizens than any other nation in the world — over 2.2 million people, a 500 percent increase over the last 40 years. This increase didn't come from rising crime, but rather from changes in law and

policy dating back to President Nixon, which led to a dramatic increase in the number of people punished with prison time.

African Americans are incarcerated at many times the rate of their white counterparts, leading law professor Michelle Alexander — author of *The New Jim Crow* — to argue that racial discrimination has transformed mass incarceration into modern-day slavery.

Like slavery before it, the pris-

on industrial complex is now an economy unto itself. As the number of incarcerations has soared, prison industrialists seized the opportunity to capitalize and started bidding for the right to incarcerate Americans and otherwise cash in.

The racial disparities are stark, particularly when it comes to the drug war. Despite the fact that African Americans and whites use drugs at similar rates, the imprisonment rate of African Americans for drug charges is almost 6 times that of whites. Prison Policy Initiative data confirms that nonviolent drug convictions are a defining characteristic of the federal prison system. Even nonviolent drug charges give people criminal records, reducing their employment prospects and increasing the likelihood of longer sentences for any future offenses.

This has impacts across gener-

ations. A recent report by the Economic Policy Institute found that by the age of 14, approximately 25 percent of African American children have experienced a parent — in most cases a father — being imprisoned for some period of time.

The “evidence is overwhelming that the unjustified incarceration of African American fathers (and, increasingly, mothers as well) is an important cause of the lowered performance of their children,” the report concludes. For example, children of incarcerated parents are more likely to misbehave at or even drop out of school, develop learning disabilities, and to suffer from migraines, asthma, high cholesterol, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and homelessness.

Juneteenth represents a milestone for America, but it's time to take the next step: criminal justice

reform to stop the growth of mass incarceration. Some states have begun to take matters into their own hands, implementing important policies to reduce the number of people in prison. But federal action is necessary to propel long-term systemic change.

Last month the House passed the First Step Act aimed at reforming our prison and jail system. Unfortunately, House members are divided over the provisions of this bill, and key Senate members have criticized the bill for not including sentencing reform.

In the spirit of Juneteenth, we need sweeping criminal justice reforms so that we can reduce mass incarceration and improve the lives of all Americans.

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