

No nukes for U.S., too

Those calling for North Korea denuclearization should call for same here

Baltimore Sun, Thursday June 14, 2018, page 14



North Korea leader Kim Jong Un, left, and U.S. President Donald Trump shake hands at the conclusion of their meetings at the Capella resort on Sentosa Island in Singapore. (Susan Walsh/Associated press)

By Gwen L. DuBois

Leaders of our country, Republican and Democrat alike, who demand that the United States accept nothing less from North Korean President Kim Jong-un than his country's unilateral denuclearization, should consider what gives America — or any country — a right to weapons with the power to end civilization as we know it.

Some disturbing truths:

We have 7,000 nuclear weapons, as does Russia . What's more, each country maintains roughly 900 nuclear weapons on "hair trigger alert," according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, which means they could be launched in minutes and potentially reach their destinations within half an hour. Once launched, they cannot be recalled.

Our nation has never renounced the right to use nuclear weapons first. The U.S. president can decide, on a bad day, to initiate a nuclear launch without going to Congress, even if that president's chief claim to fame is that he was a reality show host with a notoriously short fuse and possibly borderline personality.

Our current president, who recently left Singapore following a summit with Mr. Kim, also broke the Iran Nuclear Agreement that, though imperfect, kept Iran from developing nuclear weapons and with which Iran, it is widely accepted, was complying. We also have threatened economic sanctions on any corporation that does business with Iran making it hard for the other nations to keep the agreement intact. As a result, Iran has announced it may expand its uranium enrichment program .

The United States is presently investing \$1.7 trillion to make our nuclear weapons more useable and, if not unilaterally sparking a new nuclear arms race, surely contributing to one.

We have boycotted the most hopeful anti-nuclear development of this young century — the U.N. Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons — and instructed all of our NATO allies to do the same

Since its inception in 1970, the United States also has failed to uphold our part of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Article VI: “ 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.”

We should all be applauding the steps that Presidents Kim and Trump have taken this week and hope that they were undertaken in good faith — and that they, over time, lead to North Korea giving up its nuclear weapons. ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) — which was instrumental in creating the U.N. Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty, for which it received the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize — has published a proposal for a five-step plan that North Korea could embrace to achieve nuclear disarmament.

However nuclear disarmament is not just what we demand from other nations. It needs to be pursued by the United States as well, and this will take a groundswell from American civil society demanding a change in our nuclear policy (see preventnuclearwar.org). Americans should be ready to protest on the streets if our president suddenly pivots, announces that the talks have failed and then calls for a military solution. Metropolitan Seoul, located only 35 miles from the North Korean border and 120 miles from its capitol, has a population of 25 million people. A nuclear bomb dropped on Seoul from the North might kill anywhere from 100,000 to 600,000 depending on the weapon size and injure up to 2.5 million more. A 30-weapon nuclear ground attack by the United States, designed to take out the entire North Korean nuclear complex generating local fallout, would kill over 750,000 and injure 1 million more according to a recent report carried by CNN. If Russia or China is drawn into the fight, the planet could experience its first nuclear world war — which also would be its last.

Clearly, there is no military solution where nuclear weapons are involved. Sooner or later we must negotiate nuclear disarmament involving all nations in possession of nuclear weapons including the United States. Let this be the lesson from Singapore.

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