

# Trump's provocative tweets over North Korean missile threat

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US President-elect Donald Trump has reacted to the latest North Korean announcement last Sunday, claiming it is preparing to test an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), with provocative tweets directed against China, as well as Pyongyang.

Trump's first tweet on Monday seized on the North Korean statement that "it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the US" and flatly declared: "It won't happen."

The president-elect followed up less than an hour later with a second tweet blaming Beijing for failing to strong-arm Pyongyang into dropping its nuclear programs. "China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the US in totally one-sided trade, but won't help with North Korea. Nice!" it stated.

Trump's tweets triggered a wave of speculation especially in the American media as to what measures the new administration might adopt to prevent North Korea from developing a nuclear-capable ICBM. The possibilities ranged from doing a deal with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to imposing further economic and diplomatic sanctions, and carrying out pre-emptive military strikes on North Korean missile, nuclear and military sites.

Trump's scanty remarks on North Korea in the course of last year's election campaign have been self-contradictory. On the one hand, he has branded Kim as a "bad dude" and "a maniac" while on the other suggesting that he might sit down for a talk with the North Korean leader over a hamburger.

Trump has also hinted that he would use "economics" to force China to rein in North Korea. His latest tweet on China's "one-sided trade" with the US is in line with his stream of anti-China abuse during the election and threats to take drastic trade war measures, including imposing tariffs of 45 percent on Chinese goods.

Trump has also threatened to abandon US adherence to

the One China Policy, which has been the cornerstone of diplomatic relations between the two countries for four decades. Under the One China policy, Washington recognised Beijing as the sole, legitimate government of all China including Taiwan.

Beijing has dismissed Trump's tweets. Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang declared on Tuesday that China's efforts to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula were "clear for all to see." He referred to Beijing's sponsorship of the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programs that have included the US, Japan, Russia, China and the two Koreas, as well as its support for UN sanctions on Pyongyang over its nuclear tests.

China has been engaged in a difficult balancing act. It has sought to block North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, which give the US a pretext to ramp up its military presence in North East Asia and could prompt Japan and South Korea to seek nuclear arms. At the same time, Beijing does not want the collapse of the Pyongyang regime, which has acted as a buffer against the US and its ally, South Korea.

A comment in the state-owned Xinhua news agency also on Tuesday rebuked Trump for using twitter. "Everyone recognises the common sense that foreign policy isn't child's play and even less is it like doing business deals," it stated.

Trump's tweets, however, are a further indication that he intends to put North Korea high on his foreign policy agenda as another means of exerting pressure on China over a range of issues. Last weekend Reuters cited a senior US intelligence official saying that Trump's first, and at that time only, request for a special classified intelligence briefing was for one on North Korea and its nuclear weapons program.

Trump's focus on North Korea coincides with a push by hard-line sections of the US military and foreign policy establishment for tougher action over Pyongyang's

nuclear weapons, including military strikes.

Last September, the US Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) issued a task force report which warned that Pyongyang’s “accelerating nuclear and missile programs pose a grave and expanding threat to the territory of the US allies, to US personnel in the region, and to the continental United States.”

The report declared that Obama’s policy of sanctions had failed and the US had to present North Korea with “a sharper choice: seek a negotiated settlement to return to compliance with UN resolutions on nuclear weapons, or face severe and escalating costs.” It called for a series of moves culminating in “more assertive diplomatic and military steps, including some that directly threaten the regime’s nuclear and missile programs and, therefore, the regime itself.”

Speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies last month, the former top American commander in South Korea, retired General Walter Sharp, explicitly advocated pre-emptive military strikes against impending North Korean missile and nuclear tests. This is “very doable,” he said. “We got to make sure that we have strong defences and the strong will, and that he [Kim] knows that if he responds after we take one of his missiles out that there is a lot more coming his way.”

Such reckless military action has the potential to precipitate a full-scale war on the Korean Peninsula that would draw in other powers including China. Trump has left the world guessing as to how he intends to deal with North Korea but nothing can be ruled out. He has tweeted just prior to Christmas that the US must “greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear [weapons] capacity”—a clear warning that he sides with the most reckless and militaristic sections of the US ruling elites that are determined to ensure American supremacy even at the risk of nuclear war.



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