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## Trump, North Korea, and Iran



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As one of the original settlers of the sparsely populated territory situated between the deranged and warring states of Antitrumplandia and Philotrumplandia, I'm breathing easier today.

Anyone who longs for peace and an end to the big-power nuclear threat can only welcome what Trump and Kim did in Singapore this week. It's just the beginning, of course, and things could go south at any time, but — and this shouldn't have to be said — it's preferable to other available alternatives. Trump's earlier threats were insanely reckless

and risky, and I stand by that judgment. One cannot point to Tuesday as proof that Trump's initial stance was reasonable. No person with a gram of [historical knowledge](#) — not to mention moral decency — can think that peace-making required a threat to visit “fire and fury” on an entire society. In fact, Trump's threat did not get Kim to the table; on the contrary, Kim's nuclear tests and South Korean President Moon got Trump to the table.

I can't be sure why Trump turned around and did what he did. Maybe he thought it through carefully and concluded what many had: an agreement that includes a cessation of the provocative U.S. rehearsals of aggressive war and “security guarantees” (a peace treaty and nonaggression pledge?) was the only way to avoid an unimaginable calamity. Or maybe he just figured this is his best shot at a Nobel Peace Prize. Who cares? Peace is the priority. If Trump's legendary ego can be harnessed in its service, I say let's do it.

I'll up the ante. On the day they award Trump (and Kim and Moon) the Nobel Prize, they should take Obama's away. [He could have done what Trump did, but he wouldn't.](#)

The so-called [progressives](#) who bad-mouthed Trump in the months before the summit and who must not have consulted the hopeful South Koreans should be ashamed of themselves. (Bernie Sanders is an honorable exception.) Is their unending tantrum over having lost to Trump really more important than peace? Can you imagine what they would have been saying if Obama had met with Kim (or for that matter, what the Republicans would have been saying)? State-based politics is a cesspool. (Obama and his predecessors could have had a deal with Kim or his father or grandfather, but every step forward was [wrecked](#) by hardliners on the U.S. side.)

Even with this broad, first-step agreement, the inhabitants of Antitrumplandia can't shut up. The *Washington Post* [says](#) there were losers from the summit. Who lost? The victims of North Korean human-rights abuses, the *Post* says — as though they would benefit from war or continued, increasingly unstable cold war. Their best chance is normalization of relations between Kim and the West. Isolation does them no good.

And while we're on the subject, should Kim have raised America's dismal human-rights record? (Oh my! Not moral equivalence!) You know, mass incarceration, [CBP's separating immigrant kids from their parents](#), ICE raids, cops shooting innocent people with impunity, torture, secret CIA prisons, Guantanamo, support for dictatorships, drone-bombing of civilians, painful economic sanctions, etc.

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* pokes Trump for thinking he can succeed with Kim merely by the force of his personality. While the architects and propagandists of

America's foreign policy for the last N years tear themselves up over whether the U.S. can trust Kim, they ought to be asking if Kim, in light of 70 years of dishonorable conduct, can trust the U.S. Kim is no doubt acquainted with the cases of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi, and Iran.

And Reuters got in its shot by “reporting” on the “stunning concession” Trump made to Kim by calling a halt to regular rehearsals of the invasion and nuking of North Korea, “pulling a surprise at a summit that baffled [unnamed] allies, military officials and lawmakers from his own Republican Party.” “That was sure to rattle close allies South Korea and Japan,” the Reuters story asserted without evidence. “If implemented, the halting of the joint military exercises would be one of the most controversial moves to come from the summit. The drills help keep U.S. forces at a state of readiness in one of the world's most tense flashpoints.”

The despicable Rachel Maddow called the cessation a “giveaway to N. Korea” and — wait for it — Putin!

But stopping the war rehearsals was the *least* Trump he could have done. It's not as though his decision were irreversible, though I wish it were, and Trump said he would resume them if things don't go well. The “progressive” hysteria over this point is especially shameful.

I'm curious: what would the critics be saying if a hostile power regularly rehearsed, along with, say, Mexico, an invasion and bombing of the U.S. just off one of the coasts?

“Critics in the United States said Trump had given away too much at a meeting that provided international standing to Kim,” Reuters continued. What critics? They were left unidentified. Might they, still smarting over Hillary Clinton's embarrassing loss, have an ax to grind?

The choice between peacemonger and warmonger is too important to be decided according to the party or personality in the White House. “It is now urgent in the interest of liberty,” Institute for Humane Studies founder F. A. Harper wrote in the depths of the Cold War, “that many persons become ‘peace-mongers.’”

So, yes, nice work, Mr. Trump. But don't rest on your laurels. Let's move on to Iran. There is absolutely no good reason for his anti-Iran position. Iran was not making nuclear weapons, and American and Israeli intelligence knew it. Nevertheless, Iran agreed to the most intrusive inspections just so it could have the horrible sanctions lifted and re-enter the world economy. Iran is no threat to the American people or to anyone else, except for its internal liberal opponents. (I'm no fan of the theocracy.) Its alliance with Syria cannot

be construed as aggressive in light of what the U.S. government is doing there and throughout the region. If Trump needs an excuse for changing his tune on Iran, he can say that its ally Syrian President Bashar Assad protects Christians and other religious minorities from al-Qaeda and its ilk.

We shouldn't be naive about this. Trump's coming to his senses on North Korea gives us no reason to think he will transfer that logic to Iran. Why not? With North Korea, Trump had South Korea's Moon whispering good sense in his ear. With Iran, Trump is hearing different, more malevolent, voices: those of [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#), who for their own destructive purposes prefer chaos in Iran to the status quo — and even to liberalization.

With those bad actors sitting on Trump's shoulders, the case for optimism about the Middle East is far weaker than it is for the Korean Peninsula.