

Case 1: A New Arms Race?

It seems that each time North Korea sets off a nuclear explosion or launches another test rocket, President Donald Trump takes to Twitter to launch a volley of tweets belittling that country's leader Kim Jong-un or threatening a fiery end to his country. When the US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, has suggested negotiations to deescalate mounting tensions, he has been undercut by Trump who maintains that when it comes to North Korea, "there is only one thing that will work."

Although he won't say it, that "one thing" would appear to be war. Possibly, a nuclear war. North Korea and its leader have made clear their goal of developing a nuclear war capability including developing a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the United States.

While North Korea is busy insuring its place among the nuclear-armed nations of the world, it turns out the United States has been modernizing its own nuclear arsenal, adding yet more lethal and stealthy weapons to its inventory. It has been doing so ever since agreeing to a new arms reduction treaty with Russia in 2010. At the time, the Obama administration made a deal with Congress to revitalize the nation's aging nuclear arsenal in exchange for signing the accord. The price tag is estimated to be a trillion dollars over thirty years.

When the Trump administration took over in 2017, it wanted to spend even more—over a half billion more—with a large part of that increase going to speed up the development of an improved air-launched cruise missile designed to fly stealthily for thousands of miles and deliver a variable nuclear blast, from 5 to 150 kilotons. The intended target wouldn't see it coming and could experience destruction ranging from a fraction to ten times that delivered by the bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima.

Do the latest upgrades to the US nuclear arsenal make it more likely they will be take action against its enemies, and, more specifically, North Korea? As President Trump told members of the United Nations General Assembly in September of 2017, "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea."

Case from the 2018 National Ethics Bowl. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. © 2017 Robert Skipper, Peggy Connolly, Robert A. Currie, Cynthia Jones, and Heather Pease.