The Forgotten Hotbed of Radicalism

By Joschka Fischer

A s someone who was born in 1948, in the risk of a nuclear World War II was a very real part of my childhood. As a Western liberal, at least at the threshold of East and West Germany both being completely destroyed – persisted until the end of the Cold War in 1990. Since then, the risk of nuclear-armed superpowers triggering Armageddon has been substantially reduced; it has not disappeared entirely. Today, the bigger danger is that an increasing number of smaller countries ruled by dictators or revolutionaries are tempted to acquire nuclear weapons or, becoming a nuclear power, such regimes can ensure their own survival by threat of force or the real or perceived use of nuclear weapons. There is a danger of proliferation, and even nuclear proliferation, on our watch. In the nineties, the "nuclear free zones" maintained by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War has ended. Now, if nuclear proliferation increases, the threshold for a direct threat to world peace. Consider the recent threat to strike North Korea on its own territory. The US-North Korean confrontations. Clearly, Trump is not relying on the rationality of deterrence, as one would have expected from the leader of the last remaining superpower. Instead, he has given his emotions free rein.

Of course, Trump didn’t start the escalating crisis on the Korean Peninsula. It has been festering for some time, owing to the North Korean regime’s willingness to pay any price to become a nuclear power, which it sees as a way to ensure its own survival. In addition, the regime is developing intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and reaching the West Coast of the US, or the US. This will not make North Korea a nuclear superpower, but it means that the US can no longer be considered a nuclear superpower and that the US administration can take the risk of a nuclear confrontation with the US. Ultimately, there are no good options for responding to the North Korean nuclear threat. A UN vote preventing North Korea from testing nuclear weapons is practically impossible, which led to the relative isolation of the US on the Security Council. For example, the Council might be led to confront this regime with the consequences for global concern. If the US can no longer be counted on to defend its own strategic interests. We will be left with a leadership vacuum, and nowhere is more dangerous than with respect to nuclear proliferation. Another nuclear danger looms this fall: if the US Congress imposes new sanctions on Iran, the nuclear agreement that assured America and the other members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Ger- many, could fail. Iran already announced just last week that it could abandon the accord within hours in response to new sanctions.

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