

Mr Trump's threats

It is not easy being the world's superpower. Mr Trump swept into office on a programme of America First. He envisaged doing good deals for the USA. He did not seem keen on military interventions around the world of the kind favoured by the Clintons and the Bushes, by the State department and the Pentagon. Many people warmed to the idea that the west had intervened too much. Maybe the west had resorted to arms in too many cases where it did not have the political ability and influence to settle things well after its force had dislodged dictators or unsettled evil regimes.

Mr Trump has avoided escalation of military involvement in the Middle East. He has tried rapprochement with Russia, though this has been badly knocked by outraged Democrat opposition seeking to allege that it was all to do with Russian help for his election campaign. Just as it seemed he was turning to the main economic matters which dominated his election statements, the absurd and unpleasant dictator of North Korea decides to provoke and taunt the USA with stories of breakthroughs in weaponry, tests of missile systems, and his usual threatening language.

US policy seemed to be based on the diplomatic playbook. The State department engaged with the UN and the leading powers Russia, China and Japan to back an important UN Resolution. This pledges all to seek diplomatic solutions, whilst imposing much tougher sanctions which seek to block one third of all North Korea's exports by value. There are also travel bans and other restrictions imposed on 9 senior officials and four institutions of the North Korean state.

It therefore looked as if it came as a surprise to the US establishment when Mr Trump started talking of massive military responses should North Korea threaten the USA and its allies and territories. They soon came into line with their President and pictures emerged of the kind of weaponry the US could deploy from Guam and their carriers if need arose. This builds on the traditional exercises conducted annually with South Korea under previous Presidents to display to North Korea ability to fight and resolve to defend.

Some think Mr Trump was right to speak in the kind of language the North Korea dictator uses. Others think it is unhelpful and gives too much publicity to North Korea. I would be interested in your views.