**Gareth Evans on North Korea’s intercontinental ballistic missile test**

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By Stan Grant

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**Former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans joined 7.30 to discuss what North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile test means for Australia and the world.**

STAN GRANT, PRESENTER: "Won't happen," that is what Donald Trump once said about North Korea attaining a nuclear armed missile that could hit the United States. Well, today the world faces a new and frightening reality, the reclusive state has successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile.

The international community is now playing catch-up asking what will Kim Jong-un do next? Will the US launch a strike to disable Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal or can all parties come back to the negotiating table? Well, the stakes are high, Australia is potentially in the firing line, but former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans said we should not overreact. I spoke to him earlier.

Gareth Evans, nice to have you with us. Has the world entered a dangerous new threshold here with North Korea now that it apparently has intercontinental ballistic missiles that could reach Australia and the United States?

GARETH EVANS, FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER: Well of course, this is very disconcerting and of course it is very troubling, but I don't think we should be too spooked by it. The truth of the matter is that this regime is and always has been about regime survival.

And they know that to use these things would be, to be homicidal would to put it in a nutshell, to be suicidal. If they are about regime survival, this is not the way to guarantee regime survival.

STAN GRANT: Just explain that. If they are developing these weapons, developing a missile system capable of deploying them, why would they then not intend using them?

GARETH EVANS: Well, they think it is a deterrent against the West, be it the United States or any of its allies, mounting some kind of military attack on them to knock over the regime and replace it, as let's face it, the US has done plenty of times elsewhere and they think that having nuclear weapons is some sort of guarantee against that.

I think my judgement and that of many other analysts would be that is a false reading of the situation and that nuclear weapons, which can't in fact be used without guaranteeing retaliation that would, in fact, wipe out not only the regime but the whole country, that is not much of a deterrent in practice, but nonetheless it is obviously psychologically comforting to them as it has been to other countries and that is why they are hanging onto them like grim death.

STAN GRANT: Is the problem here that we just don't know. We have a young, untried, untested, impetuous leader in Kim Jong-un. We know a very brutal regime, we know a very secretive regime.

Nuclear weapons and the potential to use them in those hands take us into very unchartered waters. Is that the big problem here? We just don't know.

GARETH EVANS: Kim Jong-un's behaviour is often rather idiosyncratic and it is also often very ugly. But I don't think that anyone thinks he is nuts. What is interesting when you go to South Korea or look at the opinion polls in South Korea, it is very clear that South Koreans are more worried about Donald Trump than they are about the North Koreans. In terms of what might trigger an actual conflict in which they would be caught up and devastated.

So, their concern is that Donald Trump would initiate a unilateral action against North Korea?

Surely, Trump would know what the potential consequences of that would be?

GARETH EVANS: I think it is extremely unlikely and certainly all his advisers would be cautioning him against any such enterprise. Although of course he's committed himself on Twitter and elsewhere in recent months that this and that won't happen so far as the North Korean side is concerned.

But what you have to be concerned about is not so much a deliberate offensive strike, but, rather, a misjudgement about a provocative situation, a retaliation that goes too far, too fast. It doesn't take into account the possibilities for diplomatic soothing of a situation.

Just a reflex emotional response to a provocation and we just can't assume with this president that if there are any adults around him they will in fact prevail in this situation.

STAN GRANT: OK well, our Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has said that this is a provocative act, it undermines global security. You were once Foreign Minister. What would you do in this situation if you were looking for a way of trying to pull North Korea back from holding these weapons, bring them back to the negotiating table?

Well, the only strategy that has ever made any sense is a three-legged one of containment, deterrence and keeping the door open unconditionally for negotiations, whether they are bilateral, multilateral or through any other mechanism anyone can devise.

There is no guarantee this that approach will actually achieve any time soon the denuclearisation of the peninsula, getting the weapons that the North Koreans are already are in their hands out of their hands. But there is a reasonable chance that it could deliver a freeze if sufficient confidence could be built up on both sides.

That is what a lot of hard-headed American realists, like Bill Perry, Sam Nunn, George Schultz are saying, that negotiations are possible, that is the only way forward.

STAN GRANT: But we have been down that road before. The problem here is that negotiations have been held. They have been six-party talks involving the likes of China and Russia and Japan and South Korea, the United States and the DPRK and they've still walked away from those negotiations.

We know that North Korea has played a game of bait and switch in the past and has continued to develop the weapons. What would be the guarantee that those negotiations would be able to continue in good faith and bring a result?

GARETH EVANS: No guarantee, but it is the only game in town. We have been down this path a number of times. I was involved in the negotiations back in the mid-90s when I was Foreign Minister. And up until the very last of the breakdowns in 2011-12, I think it is fair to say that every time those negotiations or every time a notional deal did break down, it was as least as much, if not more, the fault of the Western powers, than it was of the North Koreans themselves.

It is a misreading of history to say that every time we have attempted, a diplomatic solution has failed because of their impossibility. I think it is very, very difficult with this new young leader who obviously is full of testosterone and determined to stare the world down. It is very, very difficult, indeed. But the military options are simply not available in this context.

Relying on China to do the job for us is not going to work. They are either unable or unwilling to go all the way and sanctions in that form of external pressure have been shown to be important in containing the regime, but not enough to get it to the negotiating table.

STAN GRANT: If, indeed, we can't get back into negotiations, if, indeed, North Korea continues to develop the weapon system, the missiles to be able to deliver them, what is the worst-case scenario?

GARETH EVANS: I think the worst case scenario is not deliberate initiation of a nuclear attack but the worst case scenario is system error, human error, miscalculation, misjudgement leading to some kind of nuclear exchange.

STAN GRANT: And that is catastrophic.

GARETH EVANS: That would be catastrophic as it would be catastrophic among any of the nuclear powers which have been juggling these weapons now for so long. It is sheer dumb luck that we have managed to avoid a nuclear weapons holocaust for the last 75 years.

It is not because of anything inherently stable about the deterrent system. It is not because of any inherent brilliance of the statesmanship of those with the finger on these triggers. It is sheer dumb luck.

STAN GRANT: We'll leave it there, thank you again for joining us Gareth Evans, a pleasure to talk to you.

GARETH EVANS: Thank you.