

President Trump Calls Out North Korea's 'Rocket Man' Before the UN

President Trump's first speech before the U.N. was vintage Trump, for better or for worse. One line in particular epitomized why some people love him and others loathe him: "Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself." Accordingly, his speech drew enthusiastic praise as well as breathless condemnation.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted, "In over 30 years in my experience with the U.N., I never heard a bolder or more courageous speech.

In stark contrast, the leftwing Israeli standard-bearer, *HaAretz* exclaimed, "Trump Delights Netanyahu With Belligerent and Nationalist Right-wing UN Speech."

According to former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton, the speech was "the best of the Trump presidency."

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Hillary Clinton told Stephen Colbert, "I thought it was very dark, dangerous, not the kind of message that the leader of the greatest nation in the world should be delivering."

To repeat: This was vintage Trump, for better or for worse.

Others have already analyzed the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the president's speech as a whole. Here, we'll focus on his comments regarding North Korea.

Not surprisingly, these comments drew the sharpest rebuke from his critics, including Chemi Shalev of *HaAretz*.

The subtitle to his article announced, "In threatening to

'totally destroy' North Korea, Trump resorted to rhetoric once reserved for half-crazed despots from semi-developed countries." As for calling Kim Jong Un "Rocket Man," Shalev suggested that "Pyongyang could very well respond with another Elton John song, 'Madman Across the Water.'"

Shalev even accused Trump of committing a war crime: "According to the laws of war and judgments rendered by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the threat of total annihilation is a war crime in and of itself. It will be welcomed in retrospect if it somehow succeeds in getting Kim to climb down from the ballistic missiles on which he is currently cruising towards confrontation. It will be seen as reckless and possibly cited in an indictment if it spurs Kim to further escalate his clash with Trump, as he's done in the past."

Hillary Clinton wished that the president had been more diplomatic, "And not call him Rocket Man, the Elton John song, but to say clearly 'we will not tolerate any attacks on our friends or ourselves.'"

But had the president been more diplomatic, we wouldn't be talking about his speech so passionately, nor would he have been true to himself (again, for better or worse). On the other hand, one can only wonder what Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Ambassador Nikki Haley were thinking as they heard their commander in chief read his "Rocket Man" line. (As of 11:33 PM, EDT, Sept. 19, the night of the speech, a Google search for "Trump 'Rocket Man' U.N." yielded 1.3 million hits.)

What, then, should we make of this historic speech, focusing on Trump's North Korea remarks?

First, he did well to call out the evils of this godless regime for the entire world to hear. "No one," he said, "has shown more contempt for other nations and for the well-being

of their own people than the depraved regime in North Korea. It is responsible for the starvation deaths of millions of North Koreans. And for the imprisonment, torture, killing and oppression of countless more."

And this was just the beginning of his scorching and well-deserved rebuke.

How typical is this kind of talk before the U.N.? According to Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, it is all too rare.

As he wrote in an email, "While it would seem to be self-evident, it is so rare to see denunciations of these rogue regimes [referring also to Iran and Venezuela] and those like them from the podium of the U.N. The United Nations has embarrassed itself as it has repeatedly morally equivocated on brutal governments and terrorists. But today President Trump, as leader of the Free World, upended the entire U.N. institution, demanding and delivering moral clarity."

Second, Trump called the bully's bluff on the most public, international platform available, warning the North Korean dictator of dire consequences should he dare go to war with America or our allies. He also called on the U.N. to do the right thing and denuclearize this rogue regime.

The president said, "No nation on earth has an interest in seeing this band of criminals arm itself with nuclear weapons and missiles. 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. ... The United States is ready, willing and able, but hopefully this will not be necessary. That's what the United Nations is all about. That's what the United Nations is for. Let's see how they do."

Obviously, the goal is to liberate North Korea, not destroy it, and we must view the people of that nation as victims more than criminals. They have been brainwashed, beaten down,

starved, deprived and deceived, and our enemy there is an evil dictator, supported by other evil people.

Yet President Trump wanted to reiterate a message he has been getting out for some weeks now on social media: "Don't mess with us, son. You're in over your head. You're out of your league. Best to go back to your fantasy world while you have a chance."

Is this the best way to deal with an unhinged, almost unaccountable dictator? Perhaps it is. I hope, at the least, that the generals and advisors counseling the president have told him this is the best way to go.

Third and last, we return to where we started, citing the most memorable words of the speech: "Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime."

To my knowledge, Kim Jong Un is not known to be a fan of Elton John. (See [here](#) for a fascinating article about Kim's alleged favorite songs, including Andrew W.K.'s "She Is Beautiful," which I just heard myself for the first time. Wild.)

So, the "Rocket Man" reference was no deeper than what it appeared to be on the surface: a demeaning and derogatory reference to Kim Jong Un as if he were a little boy playing with rockets, not to be taken seriously in the least.

Will this further provoke this unpredictable leader? Or will the public scorn, which would likely embarrass him, cause him to back off?

Only time will tell.

What we know today is that Donald Trump continues to be Donald Trump, this time on a unique world stage.

This is how he got to be president, and this is why he is so loved and so hated.

This was vintage Trump, for better or for worse.