Engaging North Korea

Why in news?

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North Korea has tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) which is capable of striking Alaska, USA.

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What was the response from US?

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- The immediate response is that the U.S. and South Korea conducted missile exercises to counter “North Korea’s destabilising and unlawful actions”.
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- Also, in a typical fashion, the US has even asked for more UN sanctions on the North.
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- US President Trump has simply followed the Obama administration’s **stick-and-sanctions policy** towards the North, but with a China emphasis.
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- The US administration have consistently took tough posture, but in reality, they have **banked heavily on China** to stop North Korea’s missile programme.
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- US had even offered China a better trade deal for its help in addressing the crisis. But none of the two strategies seems to have worked.
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Why the US’ response is ineffective so far?

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- Ever since Mr. Kim took power in 2012 he has steadily expanded North Korea’s missile programme.
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- All these years the U.S. has stepped up sanctions and taken an incrementally

harsher line towards the Kim regime.
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- If the sanctions and threats been effective as a strategy, North Korea would not have carried out the ICBM test in the first place.
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- So, after this recent ICBM testing, if the US still continues the policy of sanctions and international isolation, it would result in more trouble for the North Korean people with an uncertain effect on Mr. Kim's regime.
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- It is also unclear whether China will back further isolation.
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- Also, given the unpredictability of the Kim regime, any attack could be tantamount to a declaration of war on the Korean peninsula.
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What could be done?

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- There is another option that both the Obama and Trump administrations have seemingly overlooked so far.
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- It is to **hold direct negotiations with Pyongyang**.
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- There is the history of the North freezing its nuclear programme for nearly a decade in 1994 after a deal with world powers.
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- It may appear strange given the current hostility, but that remains the only realistic option before the US.
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Source: The Hindu

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