

As North Korea continues to antagonise the US and its allies, the prospect of war hangs in the air. But Peter Jennings, executive director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, says he doesn't think we'll see armed conflict with North Korea any time this year.

"I think the US has now resolved that it's going to exhaust all diplomatic options first before it thinks about pre-emptively striking at the North's missiles and nuclear facilities.

"And really what that means is – one more try to see if the Chinese are prepared to apply the type of sanctions that would hurt North Korea sufficiently," Jennings says.

Weighing up North Korea's nuclear capabilities, Jennings says that up until about 18 months ago, their nuclear program was "going nowhere fast". "But in the last 18 months, what we've seen is a significant acceleration of the North's nuclear testing."

"The different calculation the Americans have to factor in is that the North is getting close, and it now sees itself within a decent sprint of being able to weaponise a missile that could hit Los Angeles."

With Malcolm Turnbull's New York meeting with US President Donald Trump now confirmed for next week, Jennings has some words of counsel for the prime minister.

"My first piece of advice to the PM would be to say 'you've got nothing to be embarrassed about. We're actually an ally in good standing'. The next piece of advice would be to say 'but don't wait for president Trump to come to you with a list of things he'd like Australia to do'.

"I think we'd always be in a much better situation if we could go to the Americans and say 'now here are the things we want to do that will strengthen our alliance'."

Politics podcast: Peter Jennings on North Korea's aggression

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/politics-podcast-peter-jennings-on-north-koreas-aggression-76705>