

POLICY BRIEFING

U.S. and North Korea conflicts: is WWII near?

Abstract

For decades after the Korean War (1950-1953), there was nearly no direct diplomatic contact between U.S. and North Korea. The two countries have not established diplomatic relations and a peace treaty ending the Korean War has not been signed.

In conjunction with its alliance with South Korea, U.S. policy towards North Korea has emphasized deterring conflict on the Peninsula, preventing Pyongyang from developing nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

But nowadays the relation between the two countries has deteriorated leading US President Donald Trump and North Korea President Kim Jong-un to threaten each other with the launch of a Nuclear bomb.

In 2017 the United Nations have issued a Treaty against Nuclear weapons which is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons, with the goal of leading towards their total elimination.

The situation is globally critical as the effects of a Nuclear bomb would be devastating not only for this two countries.

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1. US vs North Korea

1.1 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons¹

More than 70 years after the world witnessed the devastating power of nuclear weapons, a **global treaty** has been approved to ban the bombs, a move that supporters hope will lead to the eventual elimination of all nuclear arms.

The treaty was endorsed by 122 countries at the United Nations headquarters in New York after months of talks in the face of strong opposition from nuclear-armed states and their allies. Only the Netherlands, which took part in the discussion, despite having US nuclear weapons on its territory, voted against the treaty.

All of the countries that bear nuclear arms and many others that either come under their protection or host weapons on their soil boycotted the negotiations. The most vocal critic of the discussions, the US, pointed to the escalation of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile program as one reason to retain its nuclear capability.

The 10-page treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons was opened for signatures from any UN member state on 20th September 2017 during the annual general assembly. Supporters of the treaty believe it has marked an important step towards a nuclear-free world by banning the weapons under international law.

Previous UN treaties have been effective even when key nations have failed to sign up to them. The US did not sign up to the landmines treaty but has completely aligned its landmines policy to comply nonetheless.

Under the new treaty, signatory states must agree not to develop, test, manufacture or possess nuclear weapons, or threaten to use them, or allow any nuclear arms to be stationed on their territory.

¹The UN Treaty:
<http://undocs.org/A/CONF.229/2017/8>

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Instead of scrapping their nuclear stocks, the UK and other nuclear powers want to strengthen the 1968 nuclear nonproliferation treaty (NPT), a pact that aims to prevent the spread of the weapons outside the original five nuclear powers: the US, Russia, Britain, France and China. It requires countries to hold back from nuclear weapons programs in exchange for a commitment from the nuclear powers to move towards nuclear disarmament and to provide access to peaceful nuclear energy technology. The new treaty reflects a frustration among non-nuclear states that the NPT has not worked as hoped.

1.2 The reason of their conflict

The end of the **WWII** meant peace and prosperity for Americans and many other people around the world. Yet, for the Koreans, as it represented difficulty.

Korea was part of the Japanese empire throughout the first half of the 20th century. When Japan fell during the WWII Korea was suddenly free and hoped to finally be able to decide the fate of their own country.

However, the **United States** and the **Soviet Union** had different ideas.

The Soviets wanted to expand the sphere of communist influence into Korea.

The United States countered by encouraging the establishment of democracy.

Additionally, the United States stressed the importance of containment, which is a foreign policy used to prevent the spread of communism.

This disagreement would eventually lead to the Korean War: the first battle of the Cold War and first major proxy war fought between the United States and a Soviet communist supported enemy. A **proxy war** occurs when one or more opposing powers instigates a war and then uses third parties to fight on their behalf.

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Figure 1:

North Korean citizens are taught America is their country's biggest Enemy.



Source: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/792012/North-Korea-Kim-Jong-UN-hate-US-conflict-Donald-Trump-war>

Official North Korea state propaganda teaches its citizens of an everlasting struggle against the US.

At the Potsdam Conference in 1945, the Allies decided to split Korea into two parts at the 38th parallel.

North Korea became a Soviet-supported communist regime under the leadership of Kim Il-sung and South Korea became a U.S.-supported democratic state under Syngman Rhee.

After the division of Korea, Kim Il-sung looked to unify the nation. He garnered support from the Soviet Union and China to launch an invasion in South Korea, and remove those who supported Syngman Rhee's appearance of democracy. Armed with Soviet rifles and tanks, North Korea crossed the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950; the war was underway.

President Harry Truman viewed the situation as more than just a war between two nations. He feared the North Korean strike was the first step in an international communist takeover led by the Soviet Union.

In response, Truman cited a 1950 National Security Council report known as **NSC-68**², which called for military force to contain communism. The President and other top officials saw the conflict as an opportunity to

² Was a 66-page top secret policy paper by the *United States National Security Council* presented to President *Harry S. Truman* on April 14, 1950. It was one of the most important statements of American policy that launched the Cold War.

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declare war against communism. Therefore, with support from the United Nations, the United States moved to establish peace and remove the communist invaders from South Korea.

The United States, and its affiliated forces, lacked an efficient strategy during the onset of the Korean War, not to mention the American soldiers found the terrain and weather extremely difficult to conduct operations in. Additional pains were caused by the inefficiently trained and poorly led South Korean army. By the beginning of September, North Korean forces had advanced all the way to the Tsushima Strait on the border of South Korea. The North Korean march also successfully captured Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

During the Cold War, the US maintained a large number of American Troops in South Korea to defend against a new North Korean attack. With the fall of the USSR and the end of substantial Soviet support flowing into the country, North Korea has stagnated economically and fallen upon hard times. However, North Korea maintains a massive, standing military and has ramped up its bellicose language and diplomatic attitude towards the South and, in particular, the United States whom they claim is occupying the South and preventing unification of the Peninsula.

The U.S. continues to maintain its troop presence at much lower numbers than during the height of the Cold War, to honor mutual defense agreements with the South Korean government that tie American military forces to the military defense of South Korea in the face of continued North Korean militarism and potential aggression.

The stated objective of US Troops in Korea is to deter aggression against South Korea by the North and, in the event that deterrence should fail, to defeat any armed threat to the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea.

Korea was divided into a communist North and a democratic South at the end of WWII. North Korea attacked the South in an attempt to unify the peninsula under its control. The attack failed but the war did not formally end.

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US Troops continue to remain in South Korea to honor its mutual defense agreement with the South while the North views the U.S. as an illegal occupying force over South Korea, preventing unification, under North Korean control.

Figure 2:

Kim Jong-un's grandfather Kim Il-sung founded the communist station of North Korea.



Source: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-10-19/kim-han-sol-grandson-late-north-korean-leader-gives-rare-interview-video>

1.3 Who supports North Korea

CHINA:

China has traditionally been North Korea's closest ally, but has condemned the latest missile test as "unacceptable". In a joint statement, President *Xi Jinping* vowed to work with Russian President *Vladimir Putin* on diplomatic approach to the Korean problem. North Korea has historically enjoyed strong links with China, its neighbor to the north and the west. But since Kim took power in 2011, the relationship has cooled.

Chinese President *Xi Jinping* is said to have a low opinion of Kim and his nuclear weapons program. Beijing has repeatedly asked Pyongyang to cease its nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches in vain.

China shares a land border with North Korea and is North Korea's main trading partner.

Beijing currently accounts for around 90 per cent of North Korea's trade. China doesn't want to control North Korea but it does want it to be more co-operative

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RUSSIA:

The USSR sided with North Korea during the WWII and it continued to prop up the regime until its collapse.

Two years ago, Russia and North Korea declared a “*year of friendship*” which aimed to enhance economic and political ties and in 2011 Moscow agreed to write off \$10 billion of the regime’s Soviet-era debt.

Russia views North Korea as important ally due to it sharing a land border which acted as a vital route for things including fuel supply. It’s in Russia’s interests to maintain North Korea as a buffer state between it and Western-allied South Korea and Japan. Russia remained one of Pyongyang’s main benefactors today.

Like China, Russia prefers a stable regime to a collapsed one. Both countries have condemned the nuclear tests,. For Russia it means they can monitor the antimissile systems of the allies.

PAKISTAN AND BULGARIA:

North Korea and Pakistan have had a diplomatic, security and economic relationship since the mid-1970s. And in the 1990s, when Pakistani Prime Minister *Benazir Bhutto* bought long-range missiles from North Korea, their relationship was even stronger.

In return, Pakistan is accused of supplying North Korea with nuclear technology.

But as North Korea’s instability worsens, it affects Pakistan’s reputation. Yet, Pakistan keeps their military ties intact for two reasons: firstly, to show their loyalty to China and secondly, to prevent an international investigation into Pakistani nuclear physicist, AQ Khan³. Pakistan gave freedom to Khan after he was accused of stealing nuclear technology from Europe and bringing atomic weaponry to Pakistan.

North Korea’s only friend in Europe is **Bulgaria**, who became an ally in 1948 during Bulgaria’s early *communist era*. The two nations also signed a bilateral co-operation agreement in 1970. But in March 2017, Bulgaria’s capital Sofia said it will take “all necessary measures” to enforce UN sanctions on North Korea.

³ **A. Q. Khan**, is a Pakistani former nuclear physicist and a metallurgical engineer, who founded the uranium enrichment program for Pakistan’s atomic bomb project.

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They introduced restrictions of coal and iron ore originating from North Korea, and even reduced the number of staff members in the North Korean embassy in Bulgaria.

1.3 Who supports USA

AUSTRALIA:

Foreign Minister *Julie Bishop* and Prime Minister *Malcolm Turnbull* both condemned Pyongyang's latest tests.

Ms Bishop said that she hoped "unprecedented pressure" should be brought to bear on North Korea including sanctions on the country's foreign trading back, a block on remittances and bans on coal, iron ore and seafood.

Ms Bishop confirmed Australia will support tougher economic sanctions on North Korea when the US calls for them at the United Nations next week.

Australia was a major US ally and this was viewed as important to our strategic interests. Therefore if conflict broke out Australia would assist the US.

This goes back to the view that if Australia was invaded the US would be useful to us as they would come to our aid. This is basically a symbolic alliance.

However Australia could play a more mediator and diplomatic role in the crisis with talks which wasn't possible for South Korea and Japan who were more closely tied up in the crisis.

JAPAN:

Japan wasn't a nuclear power and relied on its US ally for military might and protection against a North Korean missile and the two remain firm strategic partners.

Japan had a legacy of being an aggressor in the region and a past coloniser of both China and Korea, adding it was especially sensitive area for Tokyo.

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2. 2018: How US and Korea could stumble into WWIII

2.1 US bans travel to North Korea⁴

A ban on travel by U.S. passport holders to North Korea will take effect on September 1st 2017 and Americans in the country should leave before that date the U.S., State Department said on January 10th 2018.

The U.S. government said it would bar Americans from traveling to North Korea due to the risk of “long-term detention” there.

The ban comes at a time of heightened tensions between the United States and North Korea, which has been working to develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the United States.

North Korea will become the only country to which Americans are banned from traveling.

The State Department issued a notice in the Federal Register declaring U.S. passports invalid for travel to, in or through North Korea. The restriction takes effect in 30 days and applies for one year unless extended or revoked by the secretary of state.

North Korea is currently holding two Korean-American academics and a missionary, a Canadian pastor and three South Korean nationals who were doing missionary work. Japan says North Korea has also detained at least several dozen of its nationals.

⁴ Reuters, Yeganeh Torbati, 2017

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-travel/u-s-bans-travel-to-north-korea-from-september-1-says-americans-should-leave-idUSKBN1AI2H5>

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Figure 3:

People carry flags in front of statues of North Korea founder Kim Il Sung.



Source: <https://stock.adobe.com/ro/editorial/people-carry-flags-in-front-of-statues-of-north-korea-founder-kim-il-sung-and-late-leader-kim-jong-il-during-a-military-parade-in-pyongyang/145905917>

2.2 Trump tweets about nuclear war with North Korea

President Donald Trump taunted North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, warning Kim about US nuclear capabilities as tensions worsen between the two nations.

"North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the 'Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.' Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!" Trump tweeted.

The evening message followed more than a dozen others Trump had sent throughout the day on issues ranging from 'The New York Times' coverage of his administration to conflict in the Middle East.

Kim said in his annual New Year's Day address that *"The entire mainland of the US is within the range of our nuclear weapons and the nuclear button is always on the*

⁵ Source:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/02/politics/donald-trump-north-korea-nuclear/index.html>

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desk of my office. They should accurately be aware that this is not a threat but a reality."

In the address, Kim also expressed a desire for a peaceful resolution with South Korea, a break from the aggressive language he used to threaten the US.

Trump said the potentially warm gesture to South Korea from Kim is "perhaps" good news, "perhaps not," and referred to "sanctions and 'other' pressures" on North Korea.

Sanctions and "other" pressures are beginning to have a big impact on North Korea. Soldiers are dangerously fleeing to South Korea. Rocket man now wants to talk to South Korea for first time.

Press secretary *Sarah Sanders* said at the White House news briefing that the US approach to North Korea had not changed, that the US continues to regard North Korea as a global threat and seeks an international solution while keeping "all of our options on the table."

Trump has repeatedly made statements about North Korea via Twitter. The President said it was a waste of time for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to negotiate with North Korea -- referring to Kim in the tweet as "Little Rocket Man" -- shortly after the US diplomat said he hoped to de-escalate the standoff through talks.

After a North Korean statement insulted Trump by calling him a "dotard," the US President tweeted that he would "NEVER" call the North Korean leader "short and fat," while also saying that "maybe someday" he would be Kim's friend.

The UN Security Council has voted to ratchet up sanctions in response to the continued development of North Korea's nuclear program. Last month, the US conducted another round of military exercises with South Korea, which Kim called for South Korea to end in his New Year's statement.

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3. Possible impact on the world

3.1 Nuclear bomb simulation: the NUKEMAP

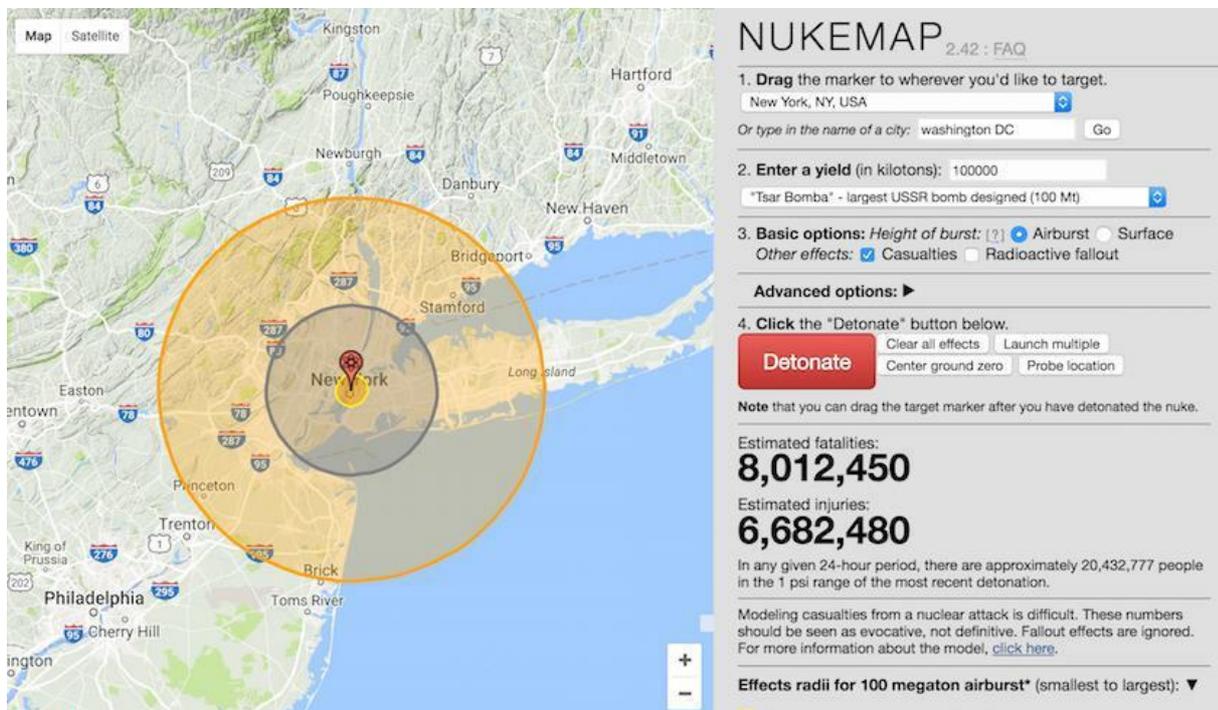
A new interactive map created by Alex Wellerstein, called **NUKEMAP**, lets you see what a nuclear bomb would do if it was dropped anywhere in the world.

Russia and U.S. combined have 93% of the world's nuclear weapons, with Russia boasting the most powerful weapon the world has ever known: *the Tsar Bomba*.

Now, thanks to a Google Maps mashup called NUKEMAP, you can see exactly the damage that bombs as small as the tiny U.S. Davy Crockett bomb or terrifying as a the Tsar Bomba would do anywhere around the globe.

Figure 4:

An illustration of a nuclear bomb simulation exploding in New York, U.S. ⁶



⁶ Source
<http://nuclearsecrecy.com/nukemap3d/>

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CONCLUSIONS

This topic is in the spotlight since many months especially these days. The deep conflict between North Korea and U.S. is affecting all the globe as the consequences would be devastating.

As pointed out in my title we are really close to a WWII due to the complications of their relation.

As stated in the paragraph 2.2 of this dissertation there has been a communication through *Twitter* between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korea President Kim Jong-un

All global institutions and the superpowers are trying to do something not to permit this nuclear war to happen but we still do not have clear the situation.

Currently there are the Olympic Winter Games in South Korea and North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un has invited South Korea's President Moon Jae-in to Pyongyang. It would be the first summit in more than a decade between Korean leaders: this is an extraordinary event that could lead to a peace between the two countries.

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