

The Threat of Nuclear War, North Korea or the United States?

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This article first published in July 2013 is the transcript of my keynote address at the 60th anniversary commemoration of the end of the Korean war, Seoul, South Korea, July 26, 2013.

North Korea is not a threat to global security. The threat of nuclear war largely emanates from the US under the doctrine of pre-emptive nuclear war (self-defense) against both nuclear and non-nuclear states.

This article provides an indepth understanding of both the historical background as well as the nature of US nuclear doctrine.

It is important to address the recent threats of the Trump administration against North Korea in a broader context.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the unspoken victim of US military aggression, has been incessantly portrayed as a war mongering nation, a menace to the American Homeland and a "threat to World peace". These stylized accusations have become part of a media consensus.

These continuous threats and actions of latent aggression directed against the DPRK should also be understood as part of the broader US military agenda in East Asia, directed against both China and Russia.

Michel Chossudovsky, April 28, 2017

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While the Western media portrays North Korea's nuclear weapons program as a threat to Global Security, it fails to acknowledge that the US has been threatening North Korea with a nuclear attack for more than half a century.

On July 27, 2013, Armistice Day, Koreans in the North and the South will be commemorating the end of the Korean war (1950-53). Unknown to the broader public, the US had envisaged the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea at the very outset of the Korean War in 1950. In the immediate wake of the war, the US deployed nuclear weapons in South Korea for use on a pre-emptive basis against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in violation of the July 1953 Armistice Agreement.

"The Hiroshima Doctrine" applied to North Korea



US nuclear doctrine pertaining to Korea was established following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, which were largely directed against civilians.

The strategic objective of a nuclear attack under the "*Hiroshima doctrine*" was to trigger a "*massive casualty producing event*" resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. The objective was to terrorize an entire nation, as a means of military conquest. Military targets were not the main objective: the notion of "*collateral damage*" was used as a justification for the mass killing of civilians, under the official pretence that Hiroshima was "*a military base*" and that civilians were not the target.

In the words of President Harry Truman:

"We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. ... This weapon is to be used against Japan ... [We] will use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop that terrible bomb on the old capital or the new. ... The target will be a purely military one... It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful." ([President Harry S. Truman, Diary, July 25, 1945](#))

"The World will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians.." (President Harry S. Truman in a radio speech to the Nation, August 9, 1945).

[Note: the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945; the Second on Nagasaki, on August 9, on the same day as Truman's radio speech to the Nation]

Nobody within the upper echelons of the US government and military believed that Hiroshima was a military base, Truman was lying to himself and to the American public. To this day the use of nuclear weapons against Japan is justified as a necessary cost for bringing the war to an end and ultimately "*saving lives*".

US Nuclear Weapons Stockpiled and Deployed in South Korea

Barely a few years after the end of the Korean War, the US initiated its deployment of nuclear warheads in South Korea. This deployment in Uijongbu and Anyang-Ni had been envisaged as early as 1956.

It is worth noting that the US decision to bring nuclear warheads to South Korea was in blatant violation of Paragraph 13(d) of the Armistice Agreement which prohibited the warring factions from introducing new weapons into Korea.

The actual deployment of nuclear warheads started in January 1958, four and a half years after the end of the Korean War, *“with the introduction of five nuclear weapon systems: the Honest John surface-to-surface missile, the Matador cruise missile, the Atomic-Demolition Munition (ADM) nuclear landmine, and the 280-mm gun and 8-inch (203mm) howitzer.”* (See [The nuclear information project: US Nuclear Weapons in Korea](#))

The Davy Crockett projectile was deployed in South Korea between July 1962 and June 1968. The warhead had selective yields up to 0.25 kilotons. The projectile weighed only 34.5 kg (76 lbs). Nuclear bombs for fighter bombers arrived in March 1958, followed by three surface-to-surface missile systems (Lacrosse, Davy Crockett, and Sergeant) between July 1960 and September 1963. The dual-mission Nike Hercules anti-air and surface-to-surface missile arrived in January 1961, and finally the 155-mm Howitzer arrived in October 1964. At the peak of this build-up, nearly 950 warheads were deployed in South Korea.

Four of the weapon types only remained deployed for a few years, while the others stayed for decades. The 8-inch Howitzer stayed until late 1991, the only weapon to be deployed throughout the entire 33-year period of U.S. nuclear weapons deployment to South Korea. The other weapons that stayed till the end were the air delivered bombs (several different bomb types were deployed over the years, ending with the B61) and the 155-mm Howitzer nuclear artillery. (Ibid)

Officially the US deployment of nuclear weapons in South Korea lasted for 33 years. The deployment was targeted against North Korea as well as China and the Soviet Union.



This composite image shows the LGM-30G Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) (L) and the LG-118A Peacekeeper missile(R). (AFP Photo/US DoD)

South Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program

Concurrent and in coordination with the US deployment of nuclear warheads in South Korea, the ROK had initiated its own nuclear weapons program in the early 1970s. The official story is that the US exerted pressure on Seoul to abandon their nuclear weapons program and “sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in April 1975 before it had produced any fissile material.” (Daniel A. Pinkston, “South Korea's Nuclear Experiments,” CNS Research Story, 9 November 2004, <http://cns.miis.edu>.)

The ROK's nuclear initiative was from the outset in the early 1970s under the supervision of the US and was developed as a component part of the US deployment of nuclear weapons, with a view to threatening North Korea.

Moreover, while this program was officially ended in 1978, the US promoted scientific expertise as well as training of the ROK military in the use of nuclear weapons. And bear in mind: under the ROK-US CFC agreement, all operational units of the ROK are under joint command headed by a US General. This means that all the military facilities and bases established by the Korean military are de facto joint facilities. There are a total of 27 US military facilities in the ROK (See [List of United States Army installations in South Korea - Wikipedia](#))

The Planning of Nuclear Attacks against North Korea from the Continental US and from Strategic US Submarines

According to military sources, the removal of US nuclear weapons from South Korea was initiated in the mid 1970s. It was completed in 1991:

The nuclear weapons storage site at Osan Air base was deactivated in late 1977. This reduction continued over the following years and resulted in the number of nuclear weapons in South Korea dropping from some 540 in 1976 to approximately 150 artillery shells and bombs in 1985. By the time of the Presidential Nuclear Initiative in 1991, roughly 100 warheads remained, all of which had been withdrawn by December 1991. ([The nuclear information project: withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from South Korea](#))

According to official statements, the US withdrew its nuclear weapons from South Korea in December 1991.

This withdrawal from Korea did not in any way modify the US threat of nuclear war directed against the DPRK. On the contrary: it was tied to changes in US military strategy with regard to the deployment of nuclear warheads. Major North Korean cities were to be targeted with nuclear warheads from US continental locations and from US strategic submarines (SSBN) rather than military facilities in South Korea:

After the withdrawal of [US] nuclear weapons from South Korea in December 1991, the 4th Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base has been tasked with nuclear strike planning against North Korea. Since then, strike planning against North Korea with non-strategic nuclear weapons has been the responsibility of fighter wings based in the continental United States. One of these is the 4th Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina. ...

“We simulated fighting a war in Korea, using a Korean scenario. ... The scenario...simulated a decision by the National Command Authority about considering using nuclear weapons....We identified aircraft, crews, and [weapon] loaders to load up tactical nuclear weapons onto our aircraft....

With a capability to strike targets in less than 15 minutes, the Trident D5 sea-launched ballistic missile is a “mission critical system” for U.S. Forces Korea. Ballistic Missile Submarines and Long-Range Bombers

In addition to non-strategic air delivered bombs, sea-launched ballistic missiles onboard strategic Ohio-class submarines (SSBNs) patrolling in the Pacific appear also to have a mission against North Korea. A DOD General Inspector report from 1998 listed the Trident system as a “mission critical system” identified by U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Forces Korea as “being of particular importance to them.”

Although the primary mission of the Trident system is directed against targets in Russia and China, a D5 missile launched in a low-trajectory flight provides a unique very short notice (12-13 minutes) strike capability against time-critical targets in North Korea. No other U.S. nuclear weapon system can get a warhead on target that fast. Two-three SSBNs are on “hard alert” in the Pacific at any given time, holding Russian, Chinese and North Korean targets at risk from designated patrol areas.

Long-range strategic bombers may also be assigned a nuclear strike role against North Korea although little specific is known. An Air Force map (see below) suggests a B-2 strike role against North Korea. As the designated carrier of the B61-11 earth penetrating nuclear bomb, the B-2 is a strong candidate for potential nuclear strike missions against North Korean deeply buried underground facilities.

As the designated carrier of the B61-11 earth penetrating nuclear bomb [with an explosive capacity between one third and six times a Hiroshima bomb] and a possible future Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, the B-2 stealth bomber could have an important role against targets in North Korea. Recent upgrades enable planning of a new B-2 nuclear strike mission in less than 8 hours. (Ibid)

“Although the South Korean government at the time confirmed the withdrawal, U.S. affirmations were not as clear. As a result, rumors persisted for a long time — particularly in North and South Korea — that nuclear weapons remained in South Korea. Yet the withdrawal was confirmed by Pacific Command in 1998 in a declassified portion of the CINCPAC Command History for 1991.” ([The nuclear information project: withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from South Korea, emphasis added](#))

The Bush Administration’s 2001 Nuclear Posture Review: Pre-emptive Nuclear War

The Bush administration in its 2001 Nuclear Posture Review established the contours of a new post 9/11 “*pre-emptive*” nuclear war doctrine, namely that nuclear weapons could be used as an instrument of “*self-defense*” against non-nuclear states

“*Requirements for U.S. nuclear strike capabilities*” directed against North Korea were established as part of a Global Strike mission under the helm of US Strategic Command Headquarters in Omaha Nebraska, the so-called CONPLAN 8022, which was directed against a number of “*rogue states*” including North Korea as well as China and Russia.

On November 18, 2005, the new Space and Global Strike command became operational at STRATCOM after passing testing in a nuclear war exercise involving North Korea.

Current U.S. Nuclear strike planning against North Korea appears to serve three roles: The first is a vaguely defined traditional deterrence role intended to influence North Korean behavior prior to hostilities.

This role was broadened somewhat by the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review to not only deter but also dissuade North Korea from pursuing weapons of mass destruction.

Why, after five decades of confronting North Korea with nuclear weapons, the Bush administration believes that additional nuclear capabilities will somehow dissuade North Korea from pursuing weapons of mass destruction [nuclear weapons program] is a mystery. (Ibid, emphasis added)

Who is the Threat? North Korea or the United States?

The asymmetry of nuclear weapons capabilities between the US and the DPRK must be emphasised. According to ArmsControl.org (April 2013) the United States:

“possesses 5,113 nuclear warheads, including tactical, strategic, and non-deployed weapons.”

According to the latest official New START declaration, out of more than 5113 nuclear weapons,

“the US deploys 1,654 strategic nuclear warheads on 792 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and strategic bombers...” ArmsControl.org (April 2013).

Moreover, according to The Federation of American Scientists the U.S. possesses 500 tactical nuclear warheads. (ArmsControl.org April 2013)

In contrast the DPRK, according to the same source:

“has separated enough plutonium for roughly 4-8 nuclear warheads. North Korea unveiled a centrifuge facility in 2010, but its ability to produce highly-enriched uranium for weapons remains unclear.”

According to expert opinion:

“there is no evidence that North Korea has the means to lob a nuclear-armed missile at the United States or anyone else. So far, it has produced several atomic bombs and tested them, but it lacks the fuel and the technology to miniaturize a nuke and place it on a missile” ([North Korea: What's really happening - Salon.com](http://NorthKorea:What'sreallyhappening-Salon.com) April 5, 2013)

According to Siegfried Hecker, one of America's pre-eminent nuclear scientists:

“Despite its recent threats, North Korea does not yet have much of a nuclear arsenal because it lacks fissile materials and has limited nuclear testing

experience,” (Ibid)

The threat of nuclear war does not emanate from the DPRK but from the US and its allies.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the unspoken victim of US military aggression, has been incessantly portrayed as a war mongering nation, a menace to the American Homeland and a “*threat to World peace*”. These stylized accusations have become part of a media consensus.

Meanwhile, Washington is now implementing a \$32 billion refurbishing of strategic nuclear weapons as well as a revamping of its tactical nuclear weapons, which according to a 2002 Senate decision “*are harmless to the surrounding civilian population.*”

These continuous threats and actions of latent aggression directed against the DPRK should also be understood as part of the broader US military agenda in East Asia, directed against China and Russia.

It is important that people across the land, in the US, Western countries, come to realize that the United States rather than North Korea or Iran is a threat to global security.

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