

War with North Korea: No Joke

By John Stanton

The 20th Century Korean War from 1950-1953 pitting US-led United Nations coalition forces against the North Korean and Chinese militaries has been in pause mode for 64 years. The Korean Armistice was signed on July 27, 1953 by the United States, China and North Korea. It called for a cessation of hostilities until a lasting peace agreement between the warring parties could be negotiated and signed.

That, of course, has not happened due as much to North Korea's rationally maniacal behavior and ruthless treatment of its citizens, as to its role as a useful pawn of the Chinese and American governments. The Chinese feel compelled to let the incendiary North Korean government in Pyongyang irritate and provoke the United States and much of the world community, and the Americans don't mind having a large military presence to deter North Korea but also to keep an eye on the China and the Southeast Asian region.

China has [apparently reinforced](#) its military forces on its border with North Korea.

[Russia](#) has a short land and maritime border with North Korea. In 2015 officials from the two countries signed an agreement to construct a road connection between the two neighbors during their "Year of Friendship." According to NK.News.org, North Korea and Russia envisioned "closer collaboration between the two states in political, economic and humanitarian spheres." As tensions ratchet up in the wake of North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile tests, Russia has apparently shored up its military forces near the bustling Russian port city of Vladivostok, home to Russia's Pacific Fleet and within range of North Korean missiles.

US-Led Coalition

These military moves by China and Russia make sense if war breaks out between a US-led coalition including South Korea, Japan, Canada, and Australia (for starters) and North Korean forces. The extra forces would likely be used to stanch the tide of North Koreans expected to stream out of North Korea. In the unfortunate circumstance that sees North Korea's first use of a nuclear weapon, a US retaliatory strike would ensure that the radiologically damaged would seek care in China and Russia, care that China and Russia can ill-afford to provide on a large scale.

During a protracted conventional conflict, it seems likely that enterprising organizations in China and Russia would attempt to funnel weapons and aid to the North Koreans to keep the US-led coalition occupied while they ponder their strategic and tactical options. With the US bogged down in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, there are many moves that the Chinese and Russians could make contrary to US interests.

The political and pundit classes in New York City and Washington, DC believe that the Trump Administration will just kick the Kim Jong-Un tin can down the road for another US president. The same elites told us all that Hillary Clinton would, with great certainty, win the 2016 presidential election. After 100 days of the Trump presidency, they still shake their heads in disbelief. Yet, they seemed to believe fully in President Trump's punitive April cruise missile strikes in Syria undertaken after a Bashar Al Assad use of a nerve agent on his own citizens.

But Trump's people say that the time for "strategic patience" with North Korea is over. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the [Perry Como of the US State Department](#), declared as much during a recent visit to South Korea. Has America's new Ken and Barbie, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, been advising President Trump on the matter?

As for China's influence, it has warned North Korea not to test Trump even as it recently resumed flights to North Korea from Beijing. Time will tell if China is serious in assisting the US or not.

Intellectuals?

Beyond the political and pundit classes who grace the world with their intellectual acumen are those across the spectrum who think that North Korea is the way it is because of the policies and practices of the US government. Those outlandish claims should not be seriously entertained. [Kim Jong-Un](#) is seen in this video smoking a cigarette and, at one point, sitting at a desk not far from an aircraft runway watching his air force and army in action. It looks a lot like a Monty Python skit until you realize that the North Koreans really believe they are a competent military power. And then there is the North Korean Army's recent live fire exercise. What kind of commanders and political leaders think that the [alignment of this artillery on a beach](#)? The commanders are essentially giving their troops a death sentence as US standoff weapons systems would mostly obliterate such massed artillery. North Korean military doctrine is as obsolete as much of its weaponry is.

Still, war is horrible and North Korea would, initially, likely cause a lot of pain to the northern portions of Seoul, South Korea. US, South and North Korean civilian casualties would certainly follow. Pain reduction, not elimination, depends on the lethality of US preemptive missile, bomber and cyber-attacks designed to neutralize what the US-led coalition's intelligence believes to be the targets most important to hit first. Most likely, both North Korean nuclear weapons testing and medium-long range missile sites would be targeted, simultaneously with other North Korean conventional military assets.

Before such a conflict de-confliction lines with China and Russia would have to be opened.

The Fight

North Korea has to know that if it moves any weapons systems into the open, the heat or electronic emissions will get them killed. US intelligence services have tried hard to anticipate how quickly the North Koreans can load and reload artillery and the extent of their ammunition supplies. Then there are the diesel submarines North Korea has in operation. US military antisubmarine warfare aircraft and detection is the best in the world and the Navy would be quick to begin the search for North Korean submarines. US attack class submarines would have to eliminate the DPRK's undersea threat very quickly, just as US air forces would be called upon to clear the airspace above North Korea as rapidly as possible. North Korean surface vessels would not do well against US anti-ship weaponry with its advanced guidance systems.

On the ground and from the sea, the situation is less clear. North Korea is vulnerable to amphibious landings on both its coastlines on the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan. The US Navy and Marine Corps would not attempt such landings until many days into a conflict though. North Korea is said to have sleeper cells in South Korea that would be activated to destroy key communications nodes and other

critical infrastructure. North Korean Special Forces are said to be a dangerous threat as in any conflict they would be tasked with infiltrating South Korea to engage in sabotage.

It is not known how the North Korean civilian population would respond to an attack. The nation is home to 25 million people who have mostly known nothing but privation and austerity. Of course, that's the view from the outside. There are tantalizing hints that the civilians there might stay away from the fighting to a limited degree. Books smuggled out of North Korea like [The Accusation](#) give a hint of some of the thinking of the well-educated and economically better positioned denizens. But the US experience with insurgencies from Vietnam until the present have not been pleasant, successful affairs. At any rate, the "will" of the North Korean population would play a significant role in a protracted conflict.

Some argue that the US should learn from its 20th Century Korean War experience. But comparisons are invalid. The conflict took place as the US was drawing down from World War II and cold political winds were blowing. Since that time the North Koreans have spent a lot of time training to fight but have not been engaged in protracted conflicts for the last two decades as the US has been. There is no substitute for training but when military forces have experience in combat operations and maintain a training regime there is going to be a mismatch at some point favoring the US.

Yet another consideration is the Joint Force capabilities of the North Korean military versus the US-coalition interoperability and joint force training. There is no evidence to suggest that North Korea has "networked" its fighting forces to wage war in the cross domains of sea, undersea, land, air, space and cyber. Nor has North Korea conducted extensive training exercises with partner or allies equivalent to Canada, Australia, Japan and South Korea.

No One Knows and that Unfinished Business Thing

A long term conflict in which the US-led coalition fails to bring North Korea to its knees would allow other nations to make risky moves. Would Russia invade Eastern Ukraine and move up to the Dnieper River? Would China move on Taiwan? Would Turkey move further into Syria? Would Iran move further into Syria and Iraq? Would Russia get more aggressive in Libya? Would Europe further splinter as some members of the European Union back the US while others do not (the UK would fight with the US)?

Would the American public support a longer term war effort?

Unfortunately, the US, North and South Korea issue is unfinished business. Not too many people on the planet want to see a video of the Kim Jong-Un of the future sitting at his portable desk smoking a cigarette while watching the North Korean "Death to America" ICBM successfully launched and carrying a nuke toward the United States.

If that ICBM made in through US missile defenses, the United States nuclear retaliatory response would turn North Korea into a radiological waste-land for decades. No one in the world wants to see that happen either.

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