

US and North Korea: Nuclear Threat Returns



The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK – North Korea) is demonised and its leader, Kim Jong-un, is abused by mainstream media around the world. People are being prepared to accept the possibility of all-out war against the DPRK. Given its relative economic decline, US imperialism intends to use its unrivalled military superiority to maintain its global hegemony. DPRK defiance cannot be tolerated. Its refusal to submit to the US results in its portrayal as dangerous. Since its formation in 1948 the DPRK has been under threat of annihilation. Historically and strategically, US confrontation with the DPRK leads to confrontation with China and Russia, with which DPRK shares borders. Trevor Rayne reports.

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly on 19 September, US President Trump threatened to 'totally destroy' the DPRK and then condemned Iran, Syria, Venezuela and Cuba. He brought Russia and China into target saying, 'We must reject threats to sovereignty from the Ukraine to the South China Sea.' This caricature of a cartoon villain was putting the world on notice.

Reinforcing his message, Trump said that the US will spend almost \$700bn on the military in the coming year. According to the US-based Council of Foreign Relations, in 2016 the US dropped an estimated 26,172 bombs on seven countries: Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Pakistan. The US has some 800 military bases in more than 150 countries, with over 30 in Japan and nearly 30 in South Korea. The DPRK has a population of 25 million people with 1.3 million in the armed forces, making it the world's fourth largest army. Most of DPRK's adult population have served in the armed forces precisely because their country is constantly under threat from the US.

Japanese occupation

The DPRK sees current US, Japanese and South Korean belligerence as a continuation of the 1950-1953 Korean War. Korea was occupied by Japan from 1894 until 1945. As Japan mobilised for the Second World War, Koreans were forced to work in Japanese factories and to serve in Japan's army. Tens of thousands of Korean women were used as sex slaves, 'comfort women', for Japanese soldiers. Many Koreans fled into China. Japan occupied north-east China (Manchuria and Inner Mongolia) and established a puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. The Korean guerrilla struggle against Japan started that year. Kim Il-sung, first president of the DPRK and grandfather of Kim Jong-un, joined the Chinese Communist Party and fought the Japanese and their Korean collaborators in Manchuria. He later served with the Soviet Red Army.

On 10 August 1945, the day after the US dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, the US secretly decided that Korea should be divided along the 38th parallel. Three weeks later, the US occupied southern Korea with 25,000 troops. As the Red Army advanced in China and then Korea, with Korean guerrillas at their side, the Japanese retreated. On reaching the south of the Korean peninsula Japanese soldiers and civil servants collaborated with the incoming US forces. The US occupied Korea to prevent Soviet influence increasing in the

Pacific region. Under the Moscow Agreement of December 1948, Britain, the US and Soviet Union agreed that Korea would become a unified, independent and democratic state. However, the US declared that its military government was the only authority in the territory it controlled and that the 'existing Japanese administration would continue in office temporarily to facilitate the occupation'. The US then produced Syngman Rhee, who had lived in the US, to head rightist groups and form a government in the south. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) was founded on 15 August 1948. Kim Il-sung proclaimed the DPRK on 9 September 1948. Soviet forces withdrew from the DPRK, but, given the weakness of the regime in the South, US troops did not leave.

Before the Korean War up to 300,000 South Koreans died at the hands of the South Korean government and the US occupation forces. 'In short, the Republic of Korea was one of the bloodiest dictatorships of the early Cold War period; many of the perpetrators of the massacres had served the Japanese in their dirty work – and were put back into power by the Americans' (Bruce Cumings, *London Review of Books* 18 May 2017).

The Korean War

Capitalist historians blame the DPRK for starting the Korean War. The war was preceded by a series of armed excursions from the South into the DPRK. On 25 June 1950, the South invaded the DPRK, following US instructions. John Foster Dulles, adviser to the US Secretary of State and director of National City Bank, told Rhee to accuse the DPRK of invading the South. The UN Security Council was summoned, with the Soviet representative absent (the Soviet Union objected to China's place being taken by the remains of the Republic that had fled to Taiwan). From 26 June US forces bombarded DPRK cities and villages. In the name of the UN, 21 countries, led by the US, provided three million soldiers to fight in Korea.

On 27 June 1950, the British Labour government agreed 'to endorse US action in opposing Communist aggression in Korea'. The Royal Navy was made available to help US troops in Korea. National service in Britain was extended from 18 months to two years and the US bomber force in Britain was increased from 180 to 1,000 planes. Between 1949 and 1951 the Labour government doubled the defence budget, at the cost, among other things, of free spectacles and false teeth on the NHS. At the Labour Party conference in October 1950, a motion critical of the government's foreign policy was defeated by 4,861,000 votes to 881,000. Almost 100,000 British soldiers were deployed in Korea. After three years of fighting the US suffered 36,574 soldiers killed; Britain had 1,109 soldiers killed.

Within one and a half months of the start of the war the DPRK's Korean People's Army (KPA) had liberated 90% of Korean territory. In September 1950 the imperialist forces launched a massive counter-assault. By mid-November they had reached the Chinese border. The KPA, with the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, counter-attacked, driving the occupying army south. By December, the whole territory north of the 38th parallel was liberated. At a press conference on 30 November 1950 US President Truman threatened to use nuclear weapons. In April 1951, the US transferred nine nuclear bombs plus atomic-capable B-29 bombers to Okinawa Japan. A ceasefire was agreed on 12 July 1953, Korea was divided at the 38th parallel, but no peace treaty was signed.

The US dropped more bombs on Korea than in the entire Pacific region in the Second World War. 'Pyongyang, a city of half a million people before 1950, was said to have had only two buildings left intact' (Robert Neer, *Napalm* 2013). 'Of more than four million casualties... at least two million were civilians... Estimated North Korean casualties numbered two million, including about one million civilians...An estimated 900,000 Chinese soldiers lost their lives in combat' (Bruce Cumings).

The DPRK seeks a nuclear deterrent

North Korea was threatened by the US with nuclear attack in 1950, 1951, 1953, 1976, 1993, 1995 and 2017. President George W Bush delivered his 'Axis of Evil' speech in January 2002, naming Iraq, Iran and the DPRK. The DPRK then withdrew from the 1992 agreement with South Korea banning nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula and announced that it had enough weapons-grade plutonium to make five or six nuclear weapons. On the day of the fall of Baghdad in 2003, the US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, told the DPRK to 'draw the appropriate lessons'. The lesson drawn was the need for a nuclear deterrent. The DPRK conducted its first nuclear test in 2006 and its sixth on 3 September 2017. The DPRK seeks the capacity to deliver a retaliatory strike sufficiently damaging to deter any would-be aggressor, thereby preventing a repetition in the DPRK of the imperialist destruction of states, as in Iraq and then Libya.

Bruce Cumings recounts that a key figure in the Japanese occupation of China was Kishi Nobuske, who ran munitions factories. Nobuske was once labelled a Class A war criminal during the US occupation of Japan, but he was rehabilitated and twice served as Japanese Prime Minister, between 1957 and 1960. On 11 February 2017, President Trump was dining with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at Trump's Florida golf club, when a message arrived: the DPRK had just successfully tested a new missile. Abe is Kishi's grandson, and reveres him. Cumings comments, 'Kim Il-sung and Kishi are meeting again through their grandsons. Eight decades have passed, and the baleful, irreconcilable hostility between North Korea and Japan still hangs in the air.'

In May 2017, DPRK said it would stop nuclear testing and missile launches if the US ended hostility and sanctions and signed a peace treaty ending the Korean War. The US has continued with military exercises, with the British RAF in attendance, practicing attacks on DPRK, it has coerced other countries into tightening sanctions and the only talks have been exchanges of insults and threats.

This August, President Trump declared that 'North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.' US Republican Senator Lindsey Graham supported Trump saying, 'If thousands die, they're going to die over there – they're not going to die here.' There are some 25 million people in the Seoul area, 35 miles from DPRK artillery and rockets. Even a limited US nuclear attack on the DPRK would result in tens of thousands of South Korean casualties; presumably expendable for Senator Graham. These hoodlums, masquerading as statesmen, never heeded the advice given by former US President Theodore Roosevelt: 'Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.' Repeated bluster and threats undermine US credibility and provoke the DPRK to hasten the development of an adequate deterrent. However, just as US credibility is undermined, so it might seek a remedy by launching an attack. Warning signs are heeded: on 25 September China's UN ambassador said, 'It's getting too dangerous and it's in nobody's interest.' South Korea's foreign minister called for the escalating tensions to end and warned of 'accidental military clashes in the region which can quickly spiral out of control'.

Russia and China do not want the DPRK destabilised, nor do they want the US to install a client regime, with US bases, on their borders. China views the US 'Pivot to Asia' as a challenge to its growing influence in the region and a military threat. Both Russia and China have criticised DPRK's nuclear weapon and missile tests. They call for the resumption of talks between the DPRK, South Korea, China, Russia, Japan plus the US, which resulted in a 2005 agreement whereby the DPRK would not produce nuclear weapons and the US pledged it had 'no intention to attack or invade' DPRK. The US government insists that DPRK abandon its nuclear weapons programme before there can be negotiations. Russian President Putin said of the DPRK, 'They will eat grass but will not stop their [nuclear] programme as long as they do not feel safe.' China's foreign ministry asked the German Chancellor and French President to intervene to prevent the crisis escalating into war. The foreign ministry said of US and British leaders, 'They are the loudest when it comes to sanctions, but nowhere to be found when it comes to making efforts to promote peace talks. They want nothing to do with responsibility.'

China accounts for approximately 80% of DPRK's trade. The US has imposed sanctions on the DPRK since 1950. Two UN Security Council resolutions passed in August and September 2017 could cut 90% off DPRK's export earnings. Without foreign exchange earnings the DPRK will be unable to import food that it needs. The sanctions include a 30% reduction in China's crude oil exports to DPRK. The US Treasury Secretary threatened to end trade with China if China continues trading with the DPRK. This is implausible: it would wreck the world economy.

Almost all DPRK families alive today lost a close relative to the imperialist war on their country. The DPRK has endured almost total destruction within living memory and the constant threat of annihilation. It is forced to take whatever steps it considers necessary to maintain its existence. All foreign troops out of Korea, end US military exercises in Korea, self-determination for the Korean people!

Trevor Rayne

Created: Thursday, 02 November 2017 11:03

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! 260 October/November 2017