

Timeline of Nuclear Threats on the Korean Peninsula

August 6 & 9, 1945. Atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some 40,000 Koreans, who were drafted to work in the Japanese factories in the two cities, die from the atomic bombings by the end of 1945.

I) During the Korean War

June 25, 1950. Border skirmishes escalate into a full-scale war between North and South Armies.

July 9, 1950. Two weeks into the war, General MacArthur requests the use of A-bombs against North Korean troops. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff sends out a study team to investigate the feasibility of using atomic bombs on the Korean battlefield.

November 30, 1950. At a press conference, President Truman states publicly that U.S. might use any weapon in its arsenal and that the use of atomic bombs is under “active consideration.”

December 24, 1950. General MacArthur requests the use of 34 atomic bombs, including commander’s discretion to use them in the Korean theatre. In interview published posthumously, he said: “I would have dropped between 30 and 50 atomic bombs...strung across the neck of Manchuria” and spread “a belt of radioactive cobalt, which has an active life of between 60 and 100 years.”

Winter 1950-51. U.S. B-29s drops Tarzon bombs on Kanggye to kill North Korean leaders. This enormous bomb, deployed for the first time, had the explosive force of 12,000 pounds of TNT.

March 10, 1951. General MacArthur requests again “‘D’ Day atomic capability.” On April 6, President Truman signs an order to use atomic bombs against Chinese and North Korean targets. Bombs were not used because Chinese and North Koreans did not escalate the war and Gen. MacArthur was removed from command.

May 1951. General Ridgway, who replaced MacArthur, asks for 38 atomic bombs.

Sept. & Oct. 1951. U.S. military flies single B-29s over North Korea, simulating a nuclear bombing runs (“Operation Hudson Harbor”) for practice.

December 1952. Just about everything in northern and central Korea was completely leveled by U.S. bombing, including cities and towns. Surviving civilians fled into caves.

May 20 1953. President Eisenhower and the National Security Council approves the use of atomic bombs if the Chinese and North Koreans did not sign the Armistice agreement. Such message was conveyed to the Chinese through third parties such as India. North Koreans and Chinese cave in to the nuclear blackmail, and armistice talks intensify.

July 27, 1953. The Armistice Agreement is signed between the generals of U.S., North Korea, and China.

II) Post-Korean War Period, 1953-1992.

December 3, 1953. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff recommends to NSC that the U.S. should launch a “massive atomic air strike” against North Korea and China if the Korean War is renewed.

1956. North Korea sends 30 students to study nuclear physics in the Soviet Union.

January 1958. U.S. military brings into South Korea 280-mm atomic cannons and Honest John nuclear-capable missiles, in violation of the Armistice Agreement. A year later, the Air Force “permanently stationed a squadron of nuclear-tipped Matador cruise missiles in Korea.”

1965. Soviet Union helps building a nuclear research reactor at Yongbyon.

1968. North Korea captures Pueblo, a U.S. Navy spy ship. In response, Johnson administration considers use of nuclear option.

1969. North Korea shoots down a U.S. EC-121 spy plane over its territory. In response, nuclear-capable B-52 bombers headed for North Korea from Guam and veered off just before reaching the DMZ.

Mid-1970s. South Korea had three nuclear power reactors in operation and six under construction. Under 1974 agreement, U.S. supplied the enriched uranium used to fuel South Korean nuclear reactors. In return, American inspectors could check on the nuclear facilities any time.

March 4, 1975. An inter-agency U.S. intelligence study concludes that Seoul was “proceeding with the initial phases of a nuclear weapons development program.” South Korean President Park Chung-Hee pursued a secret program to develop nuclear weapons capability until he is assassinated in 1979 by director of South Korean CIA.

June 20, 1975. Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger confirms openly that the U.S. “have deployed nuclear weapons in Europe and Korea along with our forces, and those nuclear weapons are available as options for the President.”

1976. Ax Murder Incident at Panmunjom. As in the EC-121 case, U.S. dispatch B-52s from Guam to fly near North Korean border.

Early 1980s. North Korea begins construction of 5-megawatt gas-graphite nuclear reactor in Yongbyon.

December 12, 1985. North Korea joins the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, North Korea delays completion of a safeguards agreement with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) until U.S. completes withdrawal of its nuclear weapons from South Korea.

May 1991. DPRK joins the United Nations.

September 27, 1991. U.S. announces the withdrawal of all naval and land-based tactical nuclear weapons from abroad, including South Korea. About 100 tactical nuclear weapons were reportedly withdrawn. However, no international inspectors ever verified the withdrawal of the nuclear weapons from South Korea. The U.S. also continues to maintain its “nuclear umbrella” protection policy over South Korea.

December 31, 1991. Two Koreas sign the South-North Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Under the Declaration, both Koreas pledge to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only, possessing neither nuclear weapons nor any nuclear processing and uranium enrichment facilities. To implement the Declaration, both sides were to establish a South-North Joint Nuclear Control Commission for inspection within one month, but this was not carried out.

January 30, 1992. North Korea concludes a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA.

February 19, 1992. Two Koreas sign Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation. Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula goes into effect.

May 4, 1992. North Korea submits its inventory of nuclear materials to the IAEA, declaring seven sites and some 90 grams of plutonium that could be subject to IAEA inspection. IAEA conducted inspections to verify the completeness of this declaration from mid-1992 to early 1993.

III) First Crisis Over North Korean Nuclear Weapons

October 1992. U.S. and South Korea announce resumption of Team Spirit joint military exercise against North Korea in early 1993.

February 9, 1993. IAEA demands an unusual special inspection of two suspect sites which were not mentioned in the initial inventory. North Korea rejects the request, claiming that they are military sites.

March 8, 1993. Team Spirit military exercise is carried out, involving some 200,000 U.S. and ROK troops, including B-1 bombers, B-52 bombers, and Navy ships carrying cruise missiles. North Korea announces its intention to withdraw from NPT.

March 12, 1993. North Korea announces its intention to withdraw from NPT in three months, citing Article X that allows withdrawal for supreme national security considerations.

April 1, 1993. IAEA adopts resolution finding North Korea in noncompliance with its safeguards obligations and refers the matter to the UN Security Council.

June 11, 1993. Following talks with the U.S. representatives in New York, North Korea suspends its withdrawal from NPT. North Korea demands “impartial application” of IAEA safeguards agreement. For its part, the U.S. gives assurances against the threat and use of force, including nuclear weapons. Washington also promises not to interfere with North Korea’s internal affairs.

December 29, 1993. North Korea agrees to accept IAEA inspections needed to maintain continuity of safeguards at seven declared sites. In exchange, U.S. agrees to suspend Team Spirit 1994.

January 1994. The director of CIA estimates that North Korea may have produced one or two nuclear weapons.

January 26, 1994. White House announces plans to send Patriot Missile Battalion to South Korea.

March 1, 1994. IAEA inspectors arrive in North Korea for further inspections since 1993.

March 15, 1994. IAEA inspection team leaves Pyongyang, having conducted inspections at all facilities except the reprocessing facility. IAEA Director General announces that the agency is unable to draw conclusions whether there has been diversion of nuclear material since earlier inspections.

March 19, 1994. U.S.-S. Korean Team Spirit military exercise is renewed.

April 1994. Clinton establishes Nuclear Crisis Group on North Korea.

June 13, 1994. North Korea withdraws from IAEA.

June 15, 1994. U.S. circulates a draft resolution to the UN Security Council, calling for sanctions against North Korea. Senior officials of the Clinton administration discuss

plans to build up its military presence in South Korea by 50,000 additional troops as well as preemptive military strikes on Yongbyon nuclear complex.

June 15-18, 1994. Former President Jimmy Carter visits North Korea and reaches a tentative nuclear agreement with DPRK President, Kim Il-Sung. North Korea agrees to freeze its nuclear activities in return for a U.S. pledge to resume high-level talks for a package deal with North Korea.

July 1994. Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean leader, dies.

October 21, 1994. The U.S. and North Korea sign the “Agreed Framework” accord. It provided an intricately linked series of steps that would eventually dismantle North Korea’s nuclear weapons program in exchange for the provision of two light-water reactors (LWR) by the target date of 2003 and normalization of relations between the U.S. and North Korea. Under the accord, North Korea immediately froze its nuclear program, ceasing its operation and construction of its nuclear facilities. In return, the U.S. agreed to provide half million metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually until the completion of the first LWR. Despite the fuel oil assistance, North Korea suffers an acute shortage of electricity, leading to a shut down of 2/3 of its factories. Clinton officials delay construction of the LWR because of the opposition of the Republican-dominated Congress and their wishful expectation that North Korean government would collapse within five years due to Kim Il-Sung’s death. Concrete for the foundation of first LWR was poured only in August 2002. South Korea provided 80% of the funding for the construction work.

March 9, 1995. KEDO is formed to build the LWRs at Kumho(Sinpo), North Korea with the U.S., South Korea and Japan as the original members of the international consortium.

1998. U.S. military conducts a simulation training exercise for a preemptive nuclear attack on the DPRK in the U.S.

May 18-24, 1999. After suspicions raised by US intelligence agencies and media, North Korea permits U.S. experts to inspect its cave complex inside the Mount Kumchangri. Inspection showed an empty cave, not suitable for installing nuclear facilities.

June 15, 2000. South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung holds a historic summit meeting with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il in Pyongyang.

October 9-12, 2000. Vice Marshall Jo Myong-Rok visits Washington as a special envoy of Chairman Kim Jong-Il.. He meets with President Clinton and other high-level officials. At the end of his visit, a U.S.-DPRK Joint Communique is issued. It stated that “the two sides agreed...to reduce tension on the Korean Peninsula and formally end the Korean War by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with permanent peace arrangements.” It also proclaimed that “neither government would have hostile intent toward the other and...to make every effort in the future to build a new relationship free from past enmity,” and announced that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to visit DPRK to prepare for a possible visit by President Clinton. (underline added for emphasis)

October 24, 2000. Secretary of State Madeline Albright visits Pyongyang and meets with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il. Kim pledges that North Korea would not further test the long-range Taepo Dong-1 missile.

December 28, 2000. Clinton announces that he will not travel to North Korea due to the presidential election dispute.

IV) Second Crisis Over North Korean Nuclear Weapons

March 2001. Upon taking office, one of President Bush's first foreign policy moves is to suspend dialogue with North Korea. Bush distances himself from the "Sunshine Policy" of the South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung during the leaders' first meeting in Washington.

January 29, 2002. Bush declares in his State of Union address that North Korea is part of an "Axis of Evil."

March 13, 2002. DPRK's Foreign Ministry spokesman says, "Now that nuclear lunatics are in office in the White House, we are compelled to examine all arrangements with the U.S.," an apparent reference to the 1994 agreement.

June 2002. Bush outlines a "preemptive strike" strategy at West Point address.

October 3-5, 2002. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly visits Pyongyang for first high-level talks with North Korea under the Bush administration.

October 16, 2002. U.S. announces that North Korea admitted to Kelly a secret program to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. North Korea denies the claim, stating that what they told Kelly was that they were "entitled" to develop any weapons if the U.S. continues its hostile policy toward North Korea. This controversy escalates the second crisis with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program.

November 2002. KEDO, at insistence of the U.S., halts its heavy oil delivery to North Korea, which was required under the 1994 agreement.

December 2002. Pentagon completes a new, secret Nuclear Posture Review policy. North Korea is named as one of seven nations to be attacked with nuclear weapons preemptively to destroy weapons of mass destruction facilities or in case of special developments.

January 2003. North Korea asks IAEA inspectors to leave North Korea. North Korea also announces full withdrawal from the NPT.

June 2003. First Six-Party Talks is held in Beijing to resolve the nuclear issue with North Korea.

February 10, 2005. North Korea declares that it "manufactured nukes" as "deterrent for self-defense."

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