



Military Presence of United States in Korean Peninsula Conflict and Intensification of Nuclear Development Programme by North Korea

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Abstract

In the last decades, the Korean Peninsula has remained a region of constant political conflict and worrisome instability. In recent times, the tension between North and South Korea has gathered momentum following North Korea's nuclear development programmes and subsequent display of military prowess by both Korea in a fashion that is characteristic of arms race of the Cold War era. The United States has wielded into the situation in the Peninsula to the effect of ending the catastrophic nuclearization. This has ballooned the historical conflict between the United States and North Korea. The paper examines Military Presence of United States in Korean Peninsula Conflict and Intensification of Nuclear Development Programme by North Korea, in order to ascertain if the continuous military presence of United States in the Korean Peninsula as sustained by Biden's Presidency contributes to the intensification of catastrophic nuclear weapons development programme by North Korea. The study adopted the 'Realist Theory' as its anchor blue-print in a pragmatic effort to explain why the engagement between the two states remain largely hostile. The study adopted content analysis for the purpose of analyzing documented materials generated through secondary sources of data collection as well as the qualitative method of data analysis. The findings show the serial and catastrophic worsening of United States and North Korea conflict with the unabated military presence of United States in Korean Peninsula and how it has intensified nuclear development programme by North Korea. Recommendations were proffered along these findings as follows, the need for reduction in the high military presence of the US in Korean Peninsula which the government of North Korea perceived as a threat to the national security of North Korea. The facts shows that North Korea will continue to feel threatened so long as the US heavy military remain in the Korean Peninsula.

Key Words: Military, United States, North Korea, Conflict, Nuclear Development, Korean Peninsula.

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DOI: 10.46333/ijtc/14/2/14

PAPER/ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED ON: 27/10/2025

ACCEPTED ON: 08/12/2025

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Oguwuike, Izuchukwu Fortunetus (2025), "Military Presence of United States in Korean Peninsula Conflict and Intensification of Nuclear Development Programme by North Korea", *International Journal of Trade and Commerce-IIARTC*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp: 479-489.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Kim Jong-un political emergence as the official president of DPRK in 2011 brought to the global scene the Kim dynasty's third generation. This assumption to office was followed by a further consolidation of grips and high-level official engagement for the purpose of advancing the purposes and ideologies of the country (CRS report, 2020). Tracing the historical trajectory of nuclear programmes in North Korea, it could be rightly said that the program did not just start without a cause. One of such causes are the series of actions by the United States which the leader of DPRK, Kim Il Sung, assumed to be a danger of immense threat to North Korea. The United States also failed to see DPRK as an independent sovereign state and subsequent economic isolation of the country prior to the Korean War. The unwavering support of the USG to South Korea during the war was also another factor that serves as an enabler in the conflict between the two countries. This support was followed by the deployment of US military and troops to South Korea as well as the Annual United States-South Korea Joint Military Drill (JMD) which North Korea views as act of provocation (Kern, 2018). All these raised the feeling of national insecurity, which subsequently engendered the nuclear proliferation program of DPRK to protect itself from the USG and its allies.

Past administrations in the United States witnessed hostile dealings with North Korea, but with the emergence of President Donald trump, the USG adopted more severe plans and strategies to punish North Korea for its nuclear programs. Some of the strategies include the placing of international sanctions on DPRK to punish and pressure her to abandon its nuclear program. The USG also initiated this process to make DPRK to agree to a round table dialogue, for the purposes of abating its nuclear proliferation agenda. In addition, between June 2018 and June 2019, Trump and Kim had three face-to-face meetings: in Singapore in June 2018, Hanoi in February 2019, and Panmunjom in June 2019. President Trump and Chairman Kim attempted a first-of-its-kind leader-to-leader discussion, since it was the first time a sitting US President and the leader of North Korea met formally to explore diplomatic ties between the two countries. Despite widespread criticisms from opposition politicians that such meeting would only give international legitimacy to North Korea's regime, President Trump argued that since past USG approaches failed to provide a desirable and sustainable non-nuclear proliferation deal with North Korea, it was important to try a leader-to-leader dialogue. President Trump also praised that his earlier strategy of "maximum pressure" as he claimed it was the only reason North Korea agreed to renegotiate with the US.

In the process of the meeting, mutual agreements and decisions were reached, which includes the commitment to the denuclearization of DPRK by Kim (Chanlett-Avery & Manyin, 2020). These authors are of the opinion that the meeting recorded some level of successes as signaled by the reduction in North Korea's incessant testing of nuclear missiles, especially between November 2017 and April 2019. The congressional research report (2020) would have us know that in the process of time, the agreement which yielded a positive outcome waned, as DPRK resumed testing of its missiles against the resolution of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This emergency has further ballooned the conflict between USG-DPRK since February 2019. Obvious observation has shown that relations between USG and DPRK have deteriorated over the years, irrespective of the meetings and diplomatic talks between the two, as expressed by the leaders of

the two countries. The continuous rise and fall of agreement between the two countries have made the two countries to forget about diplomatic sequencing and processes to facilitate the nonproliferation agreement.

Meanwhile, these negotiations over nuclear weapons over the years have failed to provide a lasting or long-term solution to the crisis in the Korean Peninsula, hence the interminable struggle for denuclearization in the region. Existing scholarly works on the struggle for denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula fall into three categories. The first category of scholars is made up of those who subscribe to the blame game perspective. Such scholars like Cummings (2004), Sigal (2016), Kern (2018), Davenport (2020), Chanlett-Avery and Manyin (2020) defend North Korea's nuclear ambition and portray the United States as the aggressor. Explaining further, scholars like Gavin (2012), Markova (2008), Horowitz (2009), among others confirm the USG hostile approach in its engagement with North Korea while also noting that North Korea has failed to be truthful about its nuclear programme as required by international law and that nobody knows the true strategic objectives of developing nuclear weapons. Although these scholars seem to defend North Korea, they noted that the deployment of the military by the both countries at strategic positions closer to either their country or those of their allies has constituted immense threat to national security, thereby necessitating actions to protect themselves from unannounced invasion. Their contributions are however nuanced as they went on to posit that North Korea lack established democratic institutions and could easily be thrown into chaos in the case of leadership crisis, thus, possession of nuclear arsenal by such state is considered a global threat. Meanwhile, scholars like Baker and Choe (2017), Rosenfeld (2018) and William (2018) defend the USG's aggressive programme in the direction of North Korea and consider the DPRK nuclear ambition as a danger to universal tranquility and safety. Baker and Choe (2017) specifically argued that Japan and South Korea were major victims of the threat from DPRK as two powerful missiles were flown across their territory for nuclear testing. In the same vein, Rosenfeld (2018) and William (2018) have blamed North Korea's lack of commitment for collapse of negotiations between the US and the DPRK.

1.1. Theoretical Trappings

This study is anchored on 'Realist Theory' propounded by Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980). As a competing theory with expanded scope in Inter-States Conflict, political realism, clearly makes advance emphasis on both the competitive and conflictual dimensions of politics. It is often opposed to principles of idealism and liberalism, both of which promote collaboration. Realists Theory in strategic studies and international conflict highlight the political restrictions imposed by people' egoistic character, as well as the lack of international government, hence an international state of anarchism. These dynamics combine to produce a conflict-based international engagement paradigm in which states are the principal players, power and security are the top concerns, and morality is a secondary consideration. The theoretical tenets abhors emphasis on the autonomy of international politics

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Military Presence of United States in Korean Peninsula Conflict and Intensifications of Nuclear Development Programme by North Korea

According to a publication by the Congressional Research Service (2020), South Korea (formally the Republic of Korea, or ROK) is a key strategic and economic partner for the United States in Asia. The US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, signed at the end of the Korean War in 1953, commits the US to assisting South Korea in its defense, notably against North Korea (formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK). The alliance also aids the US in promoting its interests in East Asia and across the world, such as by sending ROK troops to US-led military wars in the Middle East. In the Republic of Korea, approximately 28,500 US forces are stationed. The Free Trade Agreement between the United States and South Korea strengthens the economic cooperation (KORUS FTA). South Korea was the seventh- largest trading partner of the United States in 2020, while the United States was the second- largest trading partner of South Korea, behind China.

In the US-South Korea cooperation, North Korea is the most pressing strategic concern. Moon has pushed for discussions between the United States and North Korea, which he sees as crucial to avoiding military war and achieving his aim of creating a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. Pyongyang has mostly disregarded US and South Korean outreach since early 2019, and has cut off all overt inter-Korean contact lines (Congressional Research Service, 2020). However, the terms of agreement as seen in the diplomacy between the North and the South of Korea have deteriorated immensely as both countries still nurture or harbor some feelings of internal mistrust. This is further consolidated and validated by the presence of the United States in the South of Korea. The presence of the United State brought alongside with it some level of military sophistication to South Korea, the formation and establishment of strong military bases and intentions to expand and dominate other weaker nations around the region of the South Korea.

About the same time, North Korea intensified its nuclear proliferation agenda, not just for the purpose of intensifying national power but also to project the resemblance of a strong state to the United States and her allies, creating the impression that they cannot be easily overridden or threatened by the joint forces of the United States and south Korea (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

Interestingly, scholarly publications on antagonistic ties between the US and the DPRK in the pre-Cold Conflict era frequently refer to the Russia-Japan war (1904-1905), when the Japanese government persuaded the USG to acknowledge Korea as Japan's imperial province in its entirety. To the dismay of Korean nationalists who sought self-rule, the USG did not oppose and supported Japan's conquest and subsequent take-over of Korea five years after the war ended (Crabtree, 2003). Crabtree (2003) also remarked that at the turn of the twentieth century, Korean nationalists began to unite ideologically with socialist nations such as the Soviet Union and China, for example. Following Japan's defeat by coalition forces at the conclusion of WWII, the United Nations partitioned Korea into two separate territories as a temporary solution. The southern section was placed under the spheres of power of the United States, while the northern part was placed under the area of authority of the Soviet Union. The US and the Soviet Union

interaction worsened after WWII, making reunification of South and North Korea unlikely (Friedman, 2013).

According to Friedman (2013), the Korean War (1948-1950) involving the South and North Korea was another watershed moment in US-DPRK conflict, following the USG's direct military backing for Southern Korea. Following the aftermath of apparent defeat of North Korea, the USG attempted to select a military administrator. The US government was also planning to prosecute North Korean head Kim Il-sung for war crimes, but timely intervention and backing from communist countries, particularly China, spared North Korea from defeat in the Korean War (Friedman, 2013). The Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1950 to cease all conventional military hostilities between the two Koreas, despite the fact that the conflict is still technically ongoing.

No doubt, scholars and existing studies have mostly examined the denuclearization tension by anchoring their analysis on the historical dynamics of the region such as US-Soviet imperialistic influences, particularly the ties between North Korea and Russia, North Korea's unyielding commitment and quest for global significance, and concerns by the West for global peace and stability. However, these studies have not systematically investigated the worsening conflict between the US and North Korea and how it has impacted the situation in the Korean Peninsula. This study, therefore, interrogates the link between the Military Presence of United States Korea Peninsula Conflict and the intensification of Nuclear Development by North Korea

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In this study, the Time Series research design was adopted.

3.2. Method of Data Collection

We adopted the documentary method of data gathering to generate the appropriate data to test our hypothesis. According to Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2006), the documentary technique is used to obtain in-depth information and concept clarity in order to facilitate instrument design. The documentary technique aims to depict, decode, translate, and understand the meaning rather than the frequency.

3.3. Method of Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis was used to examine the data that would be collected during this investigation. According to Asika (2006), qualitative analysis entails verbally summarizing the material gathered during the study process.

4. FINDINGS

The Sustained Military Presence of United States in The Korean Peninsula Conflict and Development of Nuclear Programme by North Korea

The United States over the years has built fortifications in South Korea, ranging from the construction of military bases at different strategic places in the region, the training of South Korean military, the supply of military instrument, and other instrument of warfare. In response to the above, North Korea intensified its nuclear testing, even to the height of creating extra nuclear sites for the production of more nuclear weapons. Hence, the proliferation in the testing

of nuclear weapons in North Korea is a way of sending a clear message to the United States and its allies of the readiness of North Korea to attack any attempt at its sovereignty. Furthermore, the presence of the United States in South Korea constitutes a threat to the security and corporate existence of North Korea as they could launch attack on its territory, hereby jeopardizing the powers and reputation of North Korea. Hence, there is doubt that the continuous presence of the United States military in the Korean Peninsula would contribute to the intensification of weapon's grade nuclear development programme by North Korea. It is against this backdrop that this study is set out to explain, while validating the third hypothesis which purports that the continuous presence of the United States military in the Korean Peninsula contributes to the intensification of weapon's grade nuclear development programme by North Korea as a means to improving and securing her national security in a volatile international community and Korean Peninsula.

Indeed North Korea has been developing nuclear weapons for more than a quarter-century. It began working on nuclear weapons development in the 1980s, despite having started nuclear research in 1962. Since North Korea began testing nuclear weapons in 2006, the United States and the United Nations (IJN) have placed economic sanctions and other restraining measures on the country through nine increasingly harsh resolutions. The Security Council has unanimously approved these, the most recent in December 2017. These restrictions are aimed at making North Korea's nuclear program more costly than helpful, preventing it from gaining the technology it requires, and cutting off its cash sources. All nine resolutions have been accepted by countries that have historically supported North Korea, such as China and Russia (both permanent members of the UN Security Council). Minister of the Foreign Office Mark Field said it was not in their best interests "to have such a potentially volatile state in their backyard". Nonetheless, there are accusations that they have thwarted the imposition of tougher restrictions on North Korea.

Deployment of US Soldiers in the Korean Peninsula and North Korea's Intensification of production in Weapons of Mass Destruction

With every deployment of soldiers in the Korean Peninsula comes the establishment of military bases and cantonment. The United States in order to make available its presence in the Korean Peninsula has constructed well-fortified military, air, and naval bases around the peninsula to ward off external attacks and also to prepare the South Korea for defense in situations of unannounced attacks from their enemies. The 23,000 United States soldiers deployed to the peninsula are scattered in all the military bases in the Peninsula.

Table 1: United States' Bases in South Korea

S/N	Name of the bases	Location of the bases	Number of Soldiers Available
Air Force Bases			
1.	Kunsan Air Force Base in Gunsan, South Korea	Gunsan, US Military Bases in South Korea	2,800 Air
2	Osan Air Force Base in Songtan, South Korea	Songtan, US Military Bases in South Korea	3,597
Army Bases			



3.	Camp Carroll Army Base in Daegu City, South Korea	Daegu City, US Military Bases in South Korea	2,700
4.	Camp Castle Army Base in Daegu City, South Korea	Dongducheon, US Military Bases in South Korea	630, with about 500 being US citizens.
5.	Camp Eagle Army Base in South Korea	South Korea, US Military Bases in South Korea	386
6.	Camp Humphreys Army Base in AnjungRi, South Korea	Anjung-Ri, US Military Bases in South Korea	Almost 10000
7.	Camp Market Army Base in Bupyeong, South Korea	Bupyeong, US Military Bases in South Korea	600
8.	Camp Red Cloud Army Base in Uijeongbu, South Korea	Uijeongbu, US Military Bases in South Korea	Nil
9.	Camp Stanley Army Base in Uijeongbu, South Korea	Uijeongbu, US Military Bases in South Korea	Nil
10.	Camp Hovey Army Base in Seoul City, South Korea	Seoul City, US Military Bases in South Korea	2500
11.	Camp Casey Army Base in Daegu City, South Korea	Dongducheon, US Military Bases in South Korea	6,300
12.	K 16 Air Base Army Base in Seongnam, South Korea	Seongnam, US Military Bases in South Korea	Nil
13.	USAG Yongsan Army Base in Yongsan, South Korea	Yongsan, US Military Bases in South Korea	20,000
14.	USAG Daegu Army Base in Daegu, South Korea	Daegu, US Military Bases in South Korea	1,100
	Naval Military Base		
15.	Fleet Activities Chinhae Navy Base in Busan, South Korea	Busan, US Military Bases in South Korea	Nil

Source: Militarybases.com (2023)

The table above reveals the number of United States' Bases in South Korea. These bases are strategically placed in South Korea to monitor the activities of North Korea in the region. The bases contain not less than 50,000 soldiers put together. This is a clear indicator of intensive United States presence in the region. To the United States, the bases were instituted to help in brokering regional peace and stability, but to North Korea, the bases mean high level of surveillance, which could be interpreted to mean a threat to its national sovereignty.

The underlying motivation for the ROK-US alliance has been and remains "security and the necessity to deter, and if necessary, defend South Korea against attack" (Heo & Roehrig, 2018, p.197). South Korea has been officially at war with North Korea since the conclusion of the Korean.

Table 2: Summary of Nuclear Sites in North Korea

S/N	Name of the site	Remarks
1.	Yongbyon	Many main facilities are considered to be in Yongbyon, in the country's northwest.
2.	Tongchang-ri	The new facility is said to have aided in the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the country. There were launch tests and engine combustion tests for the modified Taepodong-2.
3.	Punggye-ri	Six underground nuclear tests were performed in Punggye-ri in the country's northeast between 2006 and 2017.
4.	Kangson	The Diplomat, an international affairs journal, and the Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey have discovered a clandestine uranium enrichment complex near Pyongyang at Kangson.
5.	Sino-ri	North Korea maintained an undeclared missile site near Sino-ri, according to a report published in January by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. According to reports, the site has not been mentioned in US-North Korean talks.
6.	Sangnam-ni	Assumed to have about 15 to 20 undeclared missiles

Source: Nikkei Asia (2021)

The table above shows the summary of Nuclear Sites in North Korea. These nuclear sites have functioned unrestrained over the years, irrespective of the attempts by the United States to shut them down. The nuclear testing sites are situated far from human habitat due to the nature of the activities that happens in the sites. The sites are known to manufacture the missiles and nuclear warheads owned and controlled by North Korea and they are strategically positioned to also monitor the activities of the United States and its allies in the region.

5. CONCLUSION

The study found that the continuous military presence of the United States in the Korean Peninsula as sustained by Biden's Presidency contributed to the intensification of nuclear weapons development programme by North Korea. United State by reason of its military alliance agreement with South Korea on October 1, 1951, intensified its presence in the Korean Peninsula. The American presence could be seen in its deployment of military personnel to South Korea and other strategic places in the Koran peninsula, the establishment of military bases at different places in the region, the training of South Korea soldiers among others. All these put together facilitated the intensification of nuclear programmes by North Korea. In the same vein, the stationing of a US aircraft carrier and several warships in the Korean waters was identified as one of the reasons why the production of nuclear warheads by almost 100% by North Korea intensified. Also, Deployment of over 23,000 US soldiers in the Korean Peninsula could be pinpointed as an obvious reason for the intensification of production in Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by North Korea. It was not neglected in analysis that the reopened 4 US

military bases in the Korean Peninsula engendered the institutionalization of operational nuclear sites in different locations in North Korea. Thus, the overarching thesis of this study is that the nature of conflict between the United States and North Korea has implications for the denuclearization tension in the Korean Peninsula. It suffices, therefore, to conclude that as long as the hostile conflict and mistrust between the United States and North Korea subsist, successful denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula will remain a distant possibility.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

If the United States and the United Nations are true to their mission of objectively stopping nuclearization in the Peninsula, it is only appropriate for the United States to reduce its military presence in the Peninsula at a time like this. The heightened military presence of the United States in the Korean Peninsula has been a major source of panic to North Korea and as such received commensurate response from North Korea through its production in weapons of mass destruction.

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