



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 30, 2013

## North Korean Dictator Ratchets Up War Threat

North Korea's youthful dictator Kim Jong-un said March 28 that his country is prepared "to settle accounts with the U.S." after two American B-2 Stealth bombers participated in recent South Korean military exercises, flying close to the northern border to drop dummy bombs in what appeared to be a subtle message aimed at the increasingly bellicose nation.



On March 29, Kim followed up his rhetoric with a declaration that North Korea had entered into a "state of war" with South Korea. "From this time on, the North-South relations will be entering the state of war, and all issues raised between the North and the South will be handled accordingly," North Korea announced in a statement released by its official news agency.

[Fox News](#) noted that the two nations are "already in a technical state of war because the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a cease-fire, not a peace treaty." But Pyongyang said earlier this month that it had decided to end the armistice, a move that has increased tension between North and South.

While American officials said the situation is serious, analysts said it seemed unlikely North Korea had the firepower to follow through on its threat to hit the United States with nuclear attacks supposedly aimed at Los Angeles, Hawaii, and even more inland cities. "Unless there has been a miraculous turnaround among North Korea's strategic forces, there is little to no chance that it could successfully land a missile on Guam, Hawaii, or anywhere else outside the Korean Peninsula that U.S. forces may be stationed," wrote James Hardy, Asia-Pacific editor of *Jane's Defence Weekly*, in a [commentary published by CNN](#).

As for the threat of war with South Korea, analysts speculated that the rhetoric is "aimed at drawing Washington into talks that could result in aid and boosting leader Kim Jong Un's image at home," reported Fox. "But the harsh rhetoric from North Korea and rising animosity from the rivals that have followed U.N. sanctions over Pyongyang's Feb. 12 nuclear test have raised worries of a misjudgment leading to a clash."

In an aggressive show of hostility toward the United States, North Korea released photos and video of a staged meeting between Kim and his nation's supposed military generals, showing the group huddled around a map labeled "U.S. Mainland Strike Plan." According to a South Korea defense ministry spokesman, small North Korean warships and patrol boats could also be seen conducting drills off the North Korean coast near the border with South Korea.

And at a staged rally March 29 in Pyongyang's main square, tens of thousands of North Koreans dutifully joined in a 90-minute rally loudly mouthing support for their supreme leader's call to arms against the United States and South Korea.



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Despite its nuclear test in February, North Korea seems to be far from developing nuclear missiles that could threaten the U.S. mainland. Nonetheless, in a statement carried on North Korean radio, the government said that it would use its nuclear capability to bring the United States to its knees. “The first strike of the revolutionary armed forces of [North Korea] will blow up the U.S. bases for aggression in its mainland and in the Pacific operational theatres including Hawaii and Guam,” North Korea said in a statement released by its news agency.

While North Korea may not be able to follow through on such overblown threats, analysts say the crisis of rhetoric could still develop into a conventional military confrontation between North and South Korea. In addition to renewed naval clashes between the two nations over disputed territory in the Yellow Sea, analysts said North Korea has the ability to wreak havoc on its southern neighbor using conventional weaponry. “The North can fire 500,000 rounds of artillery on Seoul in the first hour of a conflict,” analysts Victor Cha and David Kang wrote recently in *Foreign Policy* magazine.

Additionally, they noted, North Korea has a track record of harassing South Korean leaders, and there is no reason to believe the South’s new president, Park Geun-hye, will be immune. “Since 1992, the North has welcomed [South Korea’s] five new leaders by disturbing the peace,” recalled the analysts.

On March 28, new U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel insisted to reporters that the decision to send B-2 bombers from their bases in Missouri to join the South Korean military drills was in no way intended to provoke North Korea — even though the two aircraft ended up flying uncomfortably close to the border with the North. However, the Pentagon later acknowledged that this was the first time B-2 bombers had dropped any sort of military payloads over South Korea, and Pentagon officials were unclear as to whether the sophisticated stealth bombers had ever flown to South Korea in the past.

Analysts said in truth the presence of the aircraft was meant to send a subtle message to North Korea, as well as to prepare for any possible contingency in the area. Writing earlier in March on [ArmsControlWonk.com](#), analyst Jeffrey Lewis explained that the B-2 “can reach targets from North Korea to Iran directly from Missouri, which is what the United States did in the early stages of operations against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.”

On March 29, Pentagon officials appeared to downplay any imminent threat from North Korea in the area, with a senior Defense official saying that Kim’s threats are nothing more than “warmongering rhetoric.” Similarly Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council, said that while North Korea’s threats are a concern, “we would also note that North Korea has a long history of bellicose rhetoric and threats and today’s announcement follows that familiar pattern.”

As for South Korea, officials there have grown used to belligerent rhetoric from Kim, his father, and his grandfather, Kim Il-Sung, who ruled North Korea with an iron fist until his death in 1994. Kim Min-Seok, spokesman for the South Korean Defense Ministry, said that if North Korea were planning a legitimate attack, its officials would be making such plans in secret. “We believe that by revealing it to the media and publicizing it to the world, North Korea is playing psychology,” Kim said.

A senior Obama administration official concurred, saying that “we’re convinced this is about Kim solidifying his place with his own people and his own military, who still don’t know him. He added, “We’re worried about what he’s going to do next, but we’re not worried about what he seems to be threatening to do next.”

The [Washington Post](#) quoted another anonymous administration official as saying that “putting on a show is not the same as taking action. Describing the situation as akin to war is not to be remotely



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confused with wanting a war, let alone going to war.”

What may be of more concern is the possible response to the crisis by Russia and Communist China, both of which are allies of North Korea. On March 30, the Kremlin responded to the situation by releasing a statement saying that “Moscow expects all parties to exercise as much responsibility and restraint as possible in light of North Korea’s latest statements.” China responded in kind, saying in a statement that it hoped all “relevant parties can work together to turn around the tense situation in the region.”

*Photo of U.S. B-2 Stealth bomber in South Korea: AP Images*



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