

## WHAT SHOULD THE U.S. DO ABOUT NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

The United States and North Korea are involved in escalating tensions related to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The U.S. opposes North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons. The Supreme Leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, however, believes he needs nuclear weapons to remain in power. While war with North Korea is probably not imminent, the prospect has caused alarm. A nuclear war between the U.S. and North Korea would have devastating consequences.

The U.S. and North Korea have virtually no diplomatic contact. North Korea, officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is a secretive and isolated country. It conducts foreign relations with relatively few countries. Ninety percent of its foreign trade is done with China alone. North Korea is openly hostile to the United States and to North Korea's regional neighbors Japan and South Korea.

The government of North Korea originally began as a Marxist-Leninist state in 1948. Since 1972, however, its official ideology has been *Juche*, which means "self-reliance." The state owns all industries, agriculture, and media. Citizens have no basic freedoms, such as freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly. The supreme leaders have all been hereditary (linked to and selected from one family): Kim Jong-un is the grandson of the first supreme leader Kim Il-sung.



KCNA

North Korea's Korean Central News Agency released this photo of an inter-continental ballistic rocket prepared for a test launch.

### Threats of Nuclear Confrontation

The nuclear capabilities of the U.S. and North Korea are vastly different. The U.S. has 6,800 deliverable nuclear warheads. U.S. intelligence experts believe North Korea has between 20 and 60 nuclear weapons and may have 100 by 2020. Experts do not know if ▶

### Note to T2T Teachers

This article has a Civil Conversation activity AND a role play activity that was developed by E'Bow Morgan, South LA Teacher Leader.

You will find it in the library under both Civil Conversations and Role Play/Simulation.

### Look for Supplemental Activities!

Teacher-leaders from CRF's T2T Collab have created innovative activities for lessons in this issue! Look for the T2T symbol to access activities in the print and on-line editions.

T2T

North Korea has nuclear weapons small enough to fit on Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). ICBMs are deliverable thousands of miles away, in which case they could reach the United States. Experts predict North Korea could achieve this within a year.

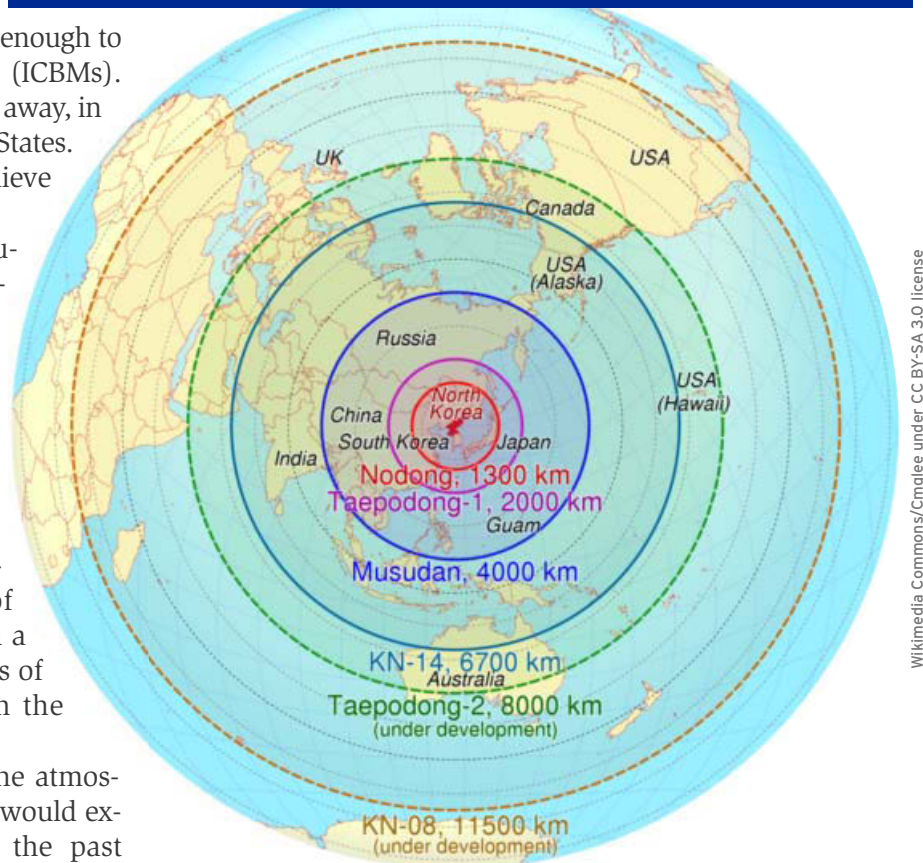
The potential consequences of nuclear war are devastating. Even a limited U.S. nuclear strike to destroy North Korea's nuclear weapons would mean hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, would die. One study conducted by U.S. scientists predicted the effects of a regional nuclear war consisting of 100 15-kiloton weapons (a kiloton is explosive power equal to 1,000 tons of TNT). These scientists predicted such a war would result in a 20-50 percent loss of the ozone, which protects earth from the sun's harmful effects.

Due to the material released into the atmosphere from the nuclear weapons, earth would experience its coldest temperatures in the past thousand years. Also, scientists predict lower rainfall resulting from colder temperatures. The colder temperatures and lower rainfall would shorten growing seasons around the earth by 10 to 40 days, which could cause a dramatic decrease in the global food supply. It would take decades for the effects to lessen and for Earth's atmosphere to return to normal.

**North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions**

North Korea's nuclear ambitions are not new. The CIA believed North Korea possessed one or two nuclear weapons in 1994. President Bill Clinton tried to negotiate a deal to halt North Korea's nuclear program but was unsuccessful. In 2003, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which aims to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. One-hundred and ninety-one countries are signatories to the treaty. The United Nations and others, like the U.S., help monitor compliance.

In recent years, North Korea has conducted six underground nuclear weapons tests as well as tests of ICBMs. The first nuclear test occurred in 2006, and a more recent test in 2017. U.S. experts estimated the 2006 test was less than one kiloton. The most recent test was between 10 to 100 kilotons. During a July 2017 ICBM test, North Korea tested ICBMs with the range to reach the U.S. for the first time. This raised the pos-



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sibility that North Korea could attack the U.S. mainland with a nuclear weapon and provoked a crisis: How should the United States respond?

Because of the crisis, rhetoric between President Trump and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un has become increasingly hostile. Speaking to the United Nations in September 2017, President Trump warned that the U.S. may have to "totally destroy" North Korea. In response, North Korea released a propaganda video showing missiles blowing up a U.S. jet and aircraft carrier. In reality the attack never occurred.

**U.S. Options**

The U.S. options for dealing with North Korea's nuclear weapons are limited. One option is direct military confrontation. The benefit of this, if successful, is that it would eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons. The consequences, however, could be grave. First, if the U.S. did not eliminate all nuclear weapons, North Korea would likely launch a counterattack. North Korea would almost certainly bomb South Korea. This could cause hundreds of thousands of deaths and jeopardize around 200,000 U.S. citizens living in South Korea. The worst-case scenario is a military confrontation with nuclear weapons. North Korea also has stores of chemical and biological weapons.

Another option is for the U.S. to engage in direct diplomacy with North Korea. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recommends the U.S. set up a “permanent presence” in Pyongyang, North Korea’s capital. He warns that North Korean authorities are very insecure and isolated, and they may overreact to U.S. threats due to some level of paranoia.

There have also been limited instances of diplomatic relations between the two countries in the past. In 2010, former President Jimmy Carter traveled to North Korea to bring home an imprisoned U.S. citizen. But diplomacy is difficult since the two countries have taken mutually exclusive positions. The U.S. believes North Korea should not possess any nuclear weapons, but Supreme Leader Kim thinks possessing nuclear weapons is essential to remaining in power.

A third option is for the U.S. to engage in containment, which is largely what the U.S. has done over the last decade. This would entail allowing North Korea to exist as a nuclear power but to contain or deter any hostility from North Korea. One proposal is a “freeze for freeze,” in which North Korea stops new weapons development, and the U.S. stops military exercises with its ally South Korea. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley rejected this proposal, saying that North Korea is an untrustworthy “rogue nation.”

A fourth option would be multilateral diplomacy. Many nations have tried this in the past. The U.S. was part of talks among North Korea, South Korea, Russia, China, and Japan with the goal of eliminating North Korea’s nuclear weapons. Those talks, however, broke off in 2009 when tensions escalated between North and South Korea. No new negotiations have begun. In addition, the UN Security Council sanctioned North Korea in response to its September 2017 nuclear test. This is the eighth set of sanctions the Security Council has adopted since 2006. None of these sanctions seem to have deterred North Korea, so far.

A fifth option requires the U.S. to rely on China to pressure North Korea. China is North Korea’s ally and largest trading partner. But some experts argue that China does not have nearly as much influence over North Korea as the U.S. thinks. Others believe China itself has concerns about its own regional security and U.S. goals in the area. China may believe that the U.S. wants either total North Korean regime change or to reunify North and South Korea. Experts believe China would rather share a border with North Korea, its ally, than with a unified Korea, which would likely be a U.S. ally.

## WRITING & DISCUSSION

1. What features of North Korea’s government and foreign relations make diplomacy with the United States difficult?
2. Article I, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power “to declare war.” The president has power as commander-in-chief, however, to initiate military actions against other countries. Do you think only Congress should be able to authorize a nuclear strike against North Korea? Or should the president have that authority? Why or why not?
3. Which of the United States’ options for dealing with North Korea’s nuclear weapons is the best option? Which is the worst? Use evidence from the article in your answer.

**For further reading:** Martz, Carlton. “North Korea: The Rogue Nation.” *Bill of Rights in Action*. Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2011. URL: <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/>

Two classroom activities accompany this article on North Korea’s nuclear capability:

1. On page 3, there is a civil conversation activity. This activity allows students to read, annotate, and discuss text in a productive, structured way in order to gain mutual understanding with their peers about controversial issues.
2. On page 4, there is a simulation activity, in which students take on the roles of expert historians and U.S. senators to decide the best policy the United States government should adopt with regard to North Korea.

### ACTIVITY: Civil Conversation on North Korea

In this activity, students are encouraged to engage intellectually with challenging materials, gain insight about their own point of view and strive for a shared understanding of issues. (Teacher instructions and student guide are in the [Curriculum Library](#).)

- Distribute a copy of the Civil Conversation Guide on pages 5 and 6 to each student.
2. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students.
3. Review the rules of a civil conversation and direct the groups to follow the instructions on the guide to get started.
4. Have students conduct a civil conversation according to the step-by-step instructions in the Civil Conversation Guide.

Teacher Instructions and Student Guide are in

## North Korea's Nuclear Threat: Time to Testify!

You are part of a group of highly regarded foreign-policy experts who have been chosen to testify before a U.S. Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee. You will be speaking about how to deal with the current North Korean nuclear threat. *Your task is to persuade the subcommittee to adopt one option for U.S. action over all the others.* Your presentation will directly influence a Senate subcommittee resolution on how the U.S. should handle this situation.

### Part One: Prepare for the Hearing

- Six students will be selected to be U.S. senators who are on the Foreign Relations subcommittee.
- The rest of the class will form small groups of foreign-policy experts. The groups should have four to six members each (but no more than six).
- Each expert group will be assigned one of the proposed options for the U.S. to deal with the North Korea crisis mentioned in the article. No more than two groups should use the same option:
 

Option 1: direct military confrontation	Option 2: direct diplomacy with North Korea
Option 3: containment	Option 4: multilateral diplomacy
Option 5: reliance on China	
- Each expert group's task is to persuade the subcommittee to adopt their assigned option over all the others.
- In your expert group, brainstorm possible benefits and consequences of your option. You may consider benefits and consequences not mentioned in the article. If possible, use your answers to the Writing & Discussion questions to help generate ideas for the brainstorm.
- Using the brainstorm, each expert group will prepare a one-minute, persuasive presentation for the subcommittee. Choose two members of your group to give your group's presentation. Presenters should be ready to answer questions from the senators. Your answers will not be counted against the one-minute limit.
- Senators will brainstorm questions they wish to ask of each of the groups. Also, decide on what order you would like for the expert groups to present. Choose one senator to be the chairperson who will call the hearing to order, direct the groups to present, and monitor the time for the presentations.

### Part Two: Conduct the Hearing

- The subcommittee chairperson will call the hearing to order and ask a group to present. After the group has presented, senators may ask additional questions of the group's presenters.
- The subcommittee chairperson and senators will repeat step one above until all the groups have presented.
- In a fishbowl, subcommittee members will discuss which option each of them prefers. Each member should give reasons why one option is better than the others.
- The subcommittee will vote on each option. The option with the most votes will be the one that the subcommittee chooses as its resolution.
- The whole class will then vote on each option.

### Part Three: Debrief the Hearing

- Compare the decision of the whole class to that of the subcommittee. Was it the same? Why or why not?
- Think about which option you personally believe is best for the U.S. If you were an expert, is your belief different than what you had to argue for? If so, did that make your brainstorm discussion difficult? Why or why not? If you were a senator in this activity, is your belief different than what the subcommittee voted for? If so, did that make your fishbowl discussion difficult? Why or why not?

### Part Four: Assessment

Write one paragraph about which option you personally believe is best for the U.S. to take in the current North Korean nuclear threat. Explain your own claims and address any counterclaims (opposing opinions) you may have read in the article or heard during the hearing. Explain the reasons why your chosen option is the best one.

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This supplemental activity was conceived by teacher-leader E'bow Morgan who teaches social studies at TEACH Charter High School in Los Angeles, California.

