

# Forum: Act to avoid a nuclear war in Korea

By Stanley Heller Published 12:00 am, Saturday, November 25, 2017

A month ago the popular radio program “On Point” Tom Ashbrook discussed the unthinkable, a nuclear war in Korea. It came after President Trump threatened to “totally destroy North Korea” and a North Korean army statement that it could make the U.S. mainland “theater of a nuclear war.” One of the people interviewed on the program was Alan Robock, a professor of climate science at Rutgers University. He was on for only a few minutes, but he raised an often overlooked and chilling statistic, the number of people who would be killed by a Korean war far away from Korea because of global cooling. In a nuclear war smoke from firestorms in cities would rise into the stratosphere where there is no rain to wash it out, it would be blown around the earth for years. Much of the sun’s rays would be blocked and there could be catastrophic crop failures and massive deaths.

His views are based on many years of research. The “nuclear winter” effect was first talked about by Carl Sagan and other U.S. and Soviet scientists in the early 1980s. Robock wrote about cooling regional weather effects of major fires in 1988. A decade ago, Robock and colleagues looked at a possible nuclear war between India and Pakistan and estimated that the explosions would have major climate effects. Four years ago Ira Helfand produced a report on the number of deaths that would result from a mutual spasm of “Hiroshima” type bomb attacks. His estimate was that crop failures and resulting conflicts would kill between one and two billion people. On the “On Point” program Robock said a nuclear war in which the U.S. destroyed all North Korean cities might produce “1/10 the smoke” of an India-Pakistan nuclear war, depending on how a war would be fought and on the targets of nuclear weapons. Robock said if there was enough smoke “agriculture could fail around the world.”

I spoke to him on Nov. 1. He explained that the study he and others did about a possible India-Pakistan war estimated a “20-40% reduction in crop yields” worldwide. He said it was very hard to know what a war limited to Korea might produce in smoke and what that would mean for agriculture as it depended on what was destroyed and weather conditions. On the other hand a war that started in Korea might not be “limited”. It could spread and be much, much worse if U.S. missiles flew over China or Russia and those countries thought they were under attack. Talking about nuclear weapons generally Robock denied the conventional notion that they “deter” attack. He pointed out that they didn’t stop Argentina going to war with Britain over the Falklands, nor did they win

wars in Vietnam or Afghanistan.

Nuclear winter effects has been taken seriously by world leaders of the past. President Reagan and President Gorbachev both publicly commented on the possibility of nuclear winter and it helped influence them to make the nuclear weapons reduction agreements that that they did. Robock wrote a letter to President Trump days after he was elected that was published on the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. In it Robock pointed out that “if either the United States or Russia attacked the other with their current arsenal, it would produce so much climate change that it would kill everyone in the country that did the attacking, even if there was no retaliation.”

President Trump spoke in South Korea on Nov. 8 and toned down the vitriol, but his administration made sure the world knew about the presence of three U.S. aircraft carriers and a submarine off the Korean coast. Things are not getting better. They’re just simmering.

We at Promoting Enduring Peace have some suggestions on avoiding another Korean War. Demand our leaders stop using the rhetoric of annihilation and genocide. React with horror if they use language like “nothing is off the table”; publicize the recent legally binding U.N. treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons; insist the president make a deal with North Korea; pursue the “Freeze for a Freeze” idea, no more North Korean nuclear and long range missile tests in exchange for a halt to U.S. war games and fly overs of South Korea; hold public negotiations so we can really see what the parties are proposing; clean our own house and openly admit that the Israeli government possesses nuclear weapons; announce that the U.S. will not launch any first strike nuclear attack against North Korea; call on North Korea to explain what it wants and give it lengthy TV air time to explain it.

At the same time insist Kim stop his illegal threats of “pre-emptive” attacks; demand Congress formally remind the president that only Congress can declare war and that going to war on his own say so is an impeachable offense.

Unfortunately, the public is taking a very passive attitude toward another Korean War, thinking it would be so terrible it could never happen. It very clearly could happen. People need to get vocal and public in opposition to any war in Korea. Hashtags? #KoreaWarOutOfTheQuestion #NoKoreaWarSavePuertoRicoInstead

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