



Conflict in the Korean Peninsula

For Prelims: Conflict in the Korean Peninsula, North Korean missile launches, 38th parallel, Korean Armistice Agreement, NPT, THAAD

For Mains: Korean War, Cold War, Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003, THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense)

Why in News?

Recently, North Korea flew 12 warplanes near its border with South Korea, prompting the latter to scramble 30 military aircraft in response.

- Tensions have risen sharply on the **Korean Peninsula** as North Korea's recent barrage of missile tests prompted **South Korea, the United States and Japan** to conduct joint drills in response.

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What is the Conflict in the Korean Peninsula?

▪ Origin:

- The root of the conflict lies in the **Japanese occupation of Korea between 1910- 1945**.
- When Japan was defeated in the [Second World War](#), the Allied forces agreed to establish a **“four-power trusteeship over Korea”** at the **Yalta Conference** (1945).
- However, the [USSR \(Union of Soviet Socialist Republics\)](#) **invaded Korea and took control of the north while the south remained under the rest of the allies, mainly the USA.**
 - The division of the two regions was along the **38th parallel north**, which still **continues to be the official border** dividing the **two Koreas**.
- **In 1948**, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) were established.
 - As both tried to enhance their reach, territorially and ideologically, the **Korean Conflict emerged** between the two nations.

▪ The Korean War:

- On 25th June 1950, North Korea, backed by the USSR, launched **an attack on South Korea** and occupied most of the country.
 - In response, the United Nations force **led by the US retaliated**.
- In 1951, the US forces led by Douglas MacArthur crossed the **38th parallel and triggered the entry of China** in support of North Korea.
 - To prevent further escalation, peace **talks began later in 1951**.
- **India was actively involved in negotiating peace in the Korean peninsula** by engaging all the major stakeholders - **US, USSR and China**.
 - In 1952, the Indian resolution on Korea was adopted at the [United Nations \(UN\)](#).
- On 27th July 1953, the [Korean Armistice Agreement](#) was signed between the UN Command, the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army.
 - It led to an official ceasefire without a Peace treaty. Thus, the war officially never ended.
 - This also led to the establishment of the **Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)** – a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula to serve as a **buffer zone between North Korea and South Korea**.
- In **December 1991**, **North and South Korea signed a pact** agreeing to refrain from aggression.

What is the US-North Korea Conflict?

- During the [Cold War era](#), the US extended its **Nuclear Umbrella** (guarantee of support during a nuclear attack) to its allies i.e. South Korea and Japan.
- North Korea withdrew from the [Non-Proliferation Treaty \(NPT\)](#) **in 2003** and afterwards, under present leader Kim Jong-un, it increased nuclear missile testing.
- In response to this, the US started deploying [THAAD \(Terminal High Altitude Area Defence\)](#) in South Korea in March 2017.
- The territorial conflict which started between North and South Korea has transformed into a tussle between the US and North Korea.

What are the Recent Acts of Aggression by North Korea?

- In recent years **North Korea has accelerated its nuclear programme** by [increasing its nuclear stockpile](#), withdrawn from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has tested nuclear explosives multiple times.
- USA has deployed [THAAD \(Terminal High Altitude Area Defence\)](#) in South Korea to counter increasing missile adventurism of North Korea.
- North Korea recently **demolished the Inter-Korean Liaison Office in Kaesong**, which was **established in 2018**. In the absence of formal diplomatic relations, the building functioned as a de facto embassy and provided a direct communication channel for the two nations.
- Most recently in 2022, North Korea conducted **a record number of missile tests**.
 - It may further raise tensions by testing an **intercontinental [ballistic missile](#)** or

conducting its first [nuclear test explosion](#) since 2017, following an old pattern of heightening tensions.

What about India's Position in Korean Conflict?

- **Indian's Stand:**
 - India has consistently **voiced its opposition to North Korean nuclear and missile tests**. However, it has **maintained a neutral stance** regarding sanctions.
 - Earlier, during the Korean War (1950- 53), India played **a major role in a cease-fire agreement signed between both the warring sides**.
- **India's Relations with North and South Korea:**
 - In May 2015, the bilateral relationship with South Korea was upgraded to **'special strategic partnership'**.
 - India has a major role to play in **South Korea's Southern Policy** under which the latter is looking at expanding relations beyond its immediate region.
 - Similarly, South Korea is a major player in [India's Act East Policy](#) under which India aims to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific.
 - India has diplomatic relations with **North Korea** for over 47 years, which reflects the legacy of India's commitment to the [Non-Alignment Movement](#).

Way Forward

- With the post-Covid geopolitical order undergoing major changes and global economic conditions deteriorating, North Korea will want to focus on strengthening its already weak economy, especially when the country has hit hard by the pandemic.
- Furthermore, at some point, **dialogue between North Korea, the United States, South Korea, Japan and other stakeholders on the Korean Peninsula will reopen**.
 - At that juncture, India would be poised to play a constructive role in promoting peace and security on the Korean Peninsula.
 - Continuing India's engagement with North Korean leadership may **pay off in these foreseeable situations**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. What is "Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)", sometimes seen in the news? (2018)

- (a) An Israeli radar system
- (b) India's indigenous anti-missile programme
- (c) An American anti-missile system
- (d) A defence collaboration between Japan and South Korea.

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. Evaluate the economic and strategic dimensions of India's Look East Policy in the context of the post-Cold War international scenario. (2016)

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