

## North Korea Nightmare: 5 Ways the U.S. Air Force Could Strike Kim

by Kyle Mizokami

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Something to think about.

*Let's hope this never happens.*

In any conflict in the skies over North Korea, the U.S. Air Force will likely follow a familiar pattern. First, it will need to sweep the skies of enemy fighters—not a difficult prospect considering the decrepit state of the North Korean air force. Concurrent with that will be a campaign to shut down the country's command and control and air defense systems, and finally a close air support and interdiction campaign designed to support friendly forces and locate and destroy enemy ground forces. Here are five weapons systems the air force would need for these missions in the next war in North Korea.

*(This first appeared in 2017.)*

### **B-2 Spirit Bomber**

North Korea's air defenses are dense but outdated, relying on anti-aircraft guns and, with the exception of a S-300 long range SAM knockoff, fairly obsolete. Despite their obsolescence, most aircraft would need careful planning to avoid being shot down.

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The [B-2 Spirit bomber](#), being stealthy would have relatively little to fear from North Korean defenses. The [B-2's](#) combination of stealth, payload, and range would make it one of the first weapons to be used early in a war scenario, [chasing down the DPRK leadership](#). Uncertainty over where the leadership may try to hide could necessitate flying over large swathes of the country, and a stealthy bomber could also prevent neighboring countries from giving Pyongyang advance warning of their approach.

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One arrow in the B-2's quiver that makes it particularly relevant is the [Massive Ordnance Penetrator, or MOP](#). The twenty foot long, thirty thousand pound bomb can [reportedly](#) penetrate up to sixty feet of concrete or two hundred feet of earth, making it the most effective nonnuclear weapon against North Korean underground facilities. A B-2 bomber can carry two MOP bombs at once.

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## **KC-135 Stratotanker**

The distance between North Korea and U.S. bases on Okinawa, Guam, and even Japan dictate that any future air campaign would need extensive tanker support. Air force tankers would not only supply U.S. Air Force aircraft but also U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and even Republic of Korea Air Force warplanes.

The bulk of aerial tanker duties would fall on the KC-135 Stratotanker. First deployed in 1956, each KC-135 can carry up to 200,000 pounds of fuel for thirsty fighters, bombers, transports and special mission aircraft operating over or near North Korea. The tanker has both boom (U.S. and ROK Air Force) and drogue (U.S. Navy and Marine Corps) refueling systems, and some can refuel two aircraft at once. 167 KC-135s are still operational worldwide.

## **C-130J Hercules**

North Korea will be a difficult country to get into, and one of the first things allied forces on the ground would do is begin securing North Korean airports and military airfields to bring in supplies and reinforcements. These facilities could sustain destruction in a war that might prevent most aircraft from using them until [air force RED HORSE engineering units](#) arrive to repair the damage.

The [C-130J Hercules](#)' ability to conduct relatively short takeoffs and landings, as well as operate from unimproved surfaces such as hard-packed dirt and gravel make it an excellent candidate for operating from airstrips near the front lines. In production for more than half a century, the latest -J version can carry up to eighteen tons of cargo. Alternately, the [C-130J](#) can carry 128 combat troops, ninety-two paratroopers, or up to seventy-four litters in the aeroevacuation medical role.

## **F-16C Fighting Falcon**

A second Korean conflict will require a multirole fighter capable of close air support and interdiction tasks. The nature of the North Korean air defense threat, largely comprised of outdated fighters and air defenses, means a fifth-generation fighter is useful but not essential to prosecuting the war in the air. A fourth-generation fighter capable of quickly switching from air-to-air to air-to-ground roles in the same mission, downing [MiG-29s](#) one moment and dropping bombs on hardened artillery sites the next is perfectly up to the task.

The workhorse fighter of a second Korean conflict will be the Fighting Falcon. Nearly one hundred USAF F-16s are based in South Korea and Japan, including two squadrons of "Wild Weasels" tasked with suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD). Air Force F-16s will carry [Sniper targeting pods](#) paired with JDAMs and laser-guided bombs to deliver precision ordnance on ground targets, [AGM-88 HARM anti-radiation missiles](#) to target North Korean radars, and [AIM-9X Sidewinder](#) and AMRAAM missiles for air-to-air engagements.

## RQ-4 Global Hawk

A key USAF requirement for Korean War II is a high altitude, long endurance drone capable of keeping watch on North Korean strategic assets, particularly its land-based missiles and missile submarines. A persistent Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability will allow the United States to hunt down mobile missile systems stashed in valleys, hillsides, and built-up areas, handing off targeting information to other forces.

The [RQ-4 Global Hawk](#) is ideally suited to the role. Capable of flying for more than thirty-four hours, Global Hawk could fly from airfields as far away as Guam, spend half a day over North Korea, and go home again—freeing up tarmac space in closer air facilities. Global Hawk's ability to conduct surveillance day or night is a major plus and its unblinking gaze will be invaluable in tracking enemy movements. Another less well known feature that will be important over North Korea: Global Hawk's [Battlefield Airborne Communications Node](#) (BACN) will provide a secure communications link between troops on the ground and close air support aircraft.

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