

# Citizen action can stop rush toward war

By David Keppel

This guest column was submitted by David Keppel, spokesperson for the Bloomington Peace Action Coalition and chair of the Just Peace Task Force of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington.

In February 2003, then Sen. Richard Lugar met with me as a representative of grassroots peace groups to discuss the forthcoming U.S. invasion of Iraq. It was a sign of Sen. Lugar's generosity and openness that he was willing to meet with a peace activist.

I asked whether he believed the administration's claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. I asked about the risk that invasion would trigger a civil war. Finally, I pleaded to give diplomacy and U.N. inspections time to work. But the invasion went forward. There were no Iraqi WMDs. The war, which cost 4,424 American and at least 190,000 Iraqi lives, as well as \$2.2 trillion, unleashed a devastating regional civil war.

Today, President Trump threatens North Korea, which has acquired nuclear weapons and missiles, with "fire and fury like the world has never seen." As in 1914, threats and miscalculation can unleash world war.

Even after a devastating first strike by the U.S., North Korea would retain heavy artillery that could inflict tens of thousands of casualties in South Korea's capital, Seoul, and it would be likely to use nuclear, chemical and biological weapons on any target its missiles could reach, including Japan. An all-out war on the Korean Peninsula could kill hundreds of thousands.

So called "preventive war" — attacking a nation that has not attacked first — is illegal under international law, a reaction to the wars of aggression launched by Hitler's Germany. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower rejected proposals to attack the Soviet Union in an effort to keep it from getting nuclear weapons. In the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, President John F. Kennedy gave

Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev a face-saving way to remove Soviet missiles in Cuba by secretly offering to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey.

Despite this diplomatic outcome, the world came frighteningly close to nuclear war, a danger that spurred President Kennedy in a speech at American University in June 1963 to call for a new policy toward the Soviet Union and a global effort toward nuclear disarmament.

The 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran proves that diplomacy can achieve what war cannot. As with North Korea, experts had warned that attacking Iran would fail to stop its nuclear program. Instead, through the accord negotiated by then Secretary of State John Kerry, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif and others, Iran agreed to ship most of its enriched uranium out of the country and put its facilities under tight inspection in turn for lifting of sanctions (an agreement now being undercut by hardliners in Congress).

Nuclear proliferation can be stopped only if the United States and other nuclear powers honor their obligation under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to work toward nuclear disarmament. Instead, the Trump administration wants to spend \$1 trillion on a new generation of nuclear weapons.

Bloomington Peace Action Coalition suggests that citizens call Sen. Joe Donnelly and Sen. Todd Young and ask them to support a bill, S.200, “The Restricting the First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act,” which would bar the president from initiating a nuclear attack without specific congressional authorization. Citizens should ask Congressman Trey Hollingsworth to support the same bill in the House, sponsored by Congressman Ted Lieu.

In addition, ask Congress to insist on diplomacy. A war in Korea would be destructive on a scale beyond even the tragic and disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Citizens stopped a bad bill on health care. On the even graver issue of war and peace, the future is in our hands.

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