## Richard Tanter, ‘Australia hardwired into US military planning in Korea’,

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<http://www.ntnews.com.au/news/opinion/richard-tanter-australia-hardwired-into-us-military-planning-in-korea/news-story/386b313e141e12d77d18a0d63398fbcd>

SOME Territorians are worrying about threats of war in Korea – with good reason.

We know that any war on the crowded Korean peninsula is a horrific prospect. Moreover, we worry that Pine Gap near Alice Springs, long a Cold War nuclear target, may well be one again today.

And when our Prime Minister says we are “joined at the hip” to the United States over Kim Jong-un’s provocations, we began to suspect, correctly as it turns out, that we are hardwired into any US war in Korea, like it or not.

A second Korean War is an appalling but all too real possibility. Knowledgeable international observers now place the chance of war at 50/50 over the next year. South Korea is a vibrant democracy and economic powerhouse many Australians know well from memories of the first Korean War, from tourism, and from close economic connections.

War would be catastrophic for the 75 million people living on a peninsula roughly the size of Victoria. And if that is not enough, war would be hugely disruptive­ for the world economy as well as for our fourth-largest trading partner.

South Korean and US forces­ in Korea, plus US forces offshore,­ are vastly superior to the ageing and ill-equipped North Korean forces. But that will be little comfort to the suburbs of Seoul well within range of massed North Korean artillery arrays in the seven to 10 days before US and South Korean counter-attacks eliminate them. And that is if our luck holds and nuclear weapons remain­ unused.

Secondly, most Australians know that Pine Gap was a certain­ nuclear target during the Cold War.

Is Pine Gap still on the nuclear­ target list? In the case of US-Russia major war, yes. In the case of US-China war, very possibly, but not for certain, because the Chinese nuclear stockpile is but a fraction of the Russian and US arsenals.

In the North Korean case? Definitely not. Not that Kim Jong-un would necessarily be reluctant if he could.

But North Korea has less than 20 primitive, dodgily manufactured, never properly tested, unreliable nuclear weapons, currently­ without the necessary range. If the regime­ is really interested in national­ suicide by using any of these, it will face the devastating capacities of US non-nuclear­ “conventional” forces.

The real danger for Australia is that we are hardwired into US military planning in Korea. This is epitomised by Pine Gap’s critical role in US global battlefield operations­.

The spy base’s tasking schedules will have been in overdrive contributing to updates­ to the North Korean Electronic Order of Battle – the key to the effectiveness of US attacks on enemy assets.

This will include the listing of the locations and characteristics of every North Korean radar, missile launcher, command centre, tank and artillery array, logistics hub, ship and aircraft, and political leadership cell phone and bolt hole.

And the risks of being drawn into war do not stop there. Much of our Defence Force is now closely integrated into its American counterparts. Two Australian frigates are currently in Korea for exercises, after several years being embedded in the US 7th Fleet based in Japan.

It is time to change our default policy setting from automatic entry into any and every US war. If we can survive Trump and Kim, an Australian government could line up with America and China and South Korea to pursue our common interest in a long-term plan for a Korean peninsula without nuclear weapons. But, the first requirement is to avoid war.