

Forum: United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Issue: The question of North Korea's nuclear program

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear program stands as one of the most complex and severe threats to global nuclear non-proliferation and international security. Despite decades of negotiations, frameworks, and some of the most extreme economic sanctions ever imposed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the DPRK has successfully developed and hence accumulated a wide and robust arsenal of nuclear weapons, paired with the ballistic missile infrastructure required to deliver them globally.¹ This initiative from Pyongyang, which began in the mid-20th century as a research project with support from the USSR,² has grown into the centrepiece of North Korea's defence and, by extension, survival strategy.

In recent times, however, the international crisis surrounding this program has shifted drastically. The optimism derived from the historic diplomatic summits of 2018 and 2019 has entirely evaporated, instead being replaced by a renewed era of militarisation for the country. By 2026, the DPRK's Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un has managed to fundamentally reshape the state's strategic position by declaring the DPRK as an irreversibly nuclear-armed state,³ while consequently destroying any hope of achieving the decades-old goal of peaceful reunification with the Republic of Korea (South Korea).⁴ The regime has pivoted from an agenda of peaceful diplomacy to one of extreme military expansion, particularly when considering its ever-growing nuclear program, which is now being expanded to provide short-range capabilities.⁵

Concurrently with these changes, the global geopolitical landscape has become deeply fractured, providing the DPRK's government with unprecedented diplomatic cover. The ongoing war in Ukraine has cemented a strategic partnership between the DPRK and the Russian

¹ Kristensen, Hans M., et al. "North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 2024." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 80, no. 4, July 2024, pp. 251–71, doi:10.1080/00963402.2024.2365013.

² Mansourov, Alexandre Y. "The Origins, Evolution, and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program." *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 2, no. 3, Sept. 1995, pp. 25–38, doi:10.1080/10736709508436590.

³ Cheong, Wook-Sik. "The DPRK's Changed Nuclear Doctrine: Factors and Implications." *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2023, pp. 136–47, doi:10.1080/25751654.2023.2188859.

⁴ Project MUSE -- Verification Required! muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/944266/pdf.

⁵ Kristensen, Hans M., et al. "North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 2024." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 80, no. 4, July 2024, pp. 251–71, doi:10.1080/00963402.2024.2365013.

Federation, which culminated in the June 2024 mutual defence pact, as well as the large amounts of ammunition provided by the DPRK to the Russian Military fighting in Ukraine.⁶ In exchange for its support, the DPRK was provided with vast economic relief and technical assistance, effectively making the UNSC's existing sanctions and any future sanctions that may be imposed ineffective.⁷ Due to these circumstances, the DPRK was able to build and subsequently reveal a new modern uranium enrichment facility, with further pledges being made to expand the country's nuclear arsenal at an "exponential rate".⁸

As this crisis continues to evolve, it is essential to understand the dilemma that the UNSC faces. Now is the time to decide whether to maintain the agenda of complete denuclearisation, an agenda which North Korea has rejected for over three decades; or whether to swap to a more pragmatic arms control centred solution. The UNSC must also face another decision on its sanctions regime, whether to discontinue it or whether to further bolster it. It is clearly imperative that the UNSC collectively decides on how to best address core structural flaws associated with its traditional response to the North Korean threat, and what can best be done to ensure that the threat is addressed.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD)

A Weapon of Mass Destruction is defined as "any weapon or weapons system employing chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials that is able to cause widespread devastation and loss of life".⁹

Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM)

An intercontinental ballistic missile is defined as a "land-based, nuclear-armed ballistic missile with a range of more than 5600km".¹⁰

⁶ Hird, Karolina, et al. *North Korea Joins Russia's War Against Ukraine: Operational and Strategic Implications in Ukraine and Northeast Asia*. Institute for the Study of War, 25 Oct. 2024, understandingwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/North-Korea-Joins-Russias-War-Against-Ukraine-Operational-and-Strategic-Implications-in-Ukraine-and-Northeast-Asia-PDF.pdf.

⁷ Suh, Elisabeth. *North Korea's Arms Policy as an Indirect Security Threat to Europe*. German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Oct. 2023, www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2024C49_NorthKorea_ArmsPolicy.pdf.

⁸ *Missiles, Preemption, and the Risk of Nuclear War on the Korean Peninsula* | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-03/features/missiles-preemption-and-risk-nuclear-war-korean-peninsula.

⁹ "Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)." *Site Name Seo*, www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/weapons-of-mass-destruction.

¹⁰ Britannica Editors. (2026, May 25). ICBM | Intercontinental, nuclear, ballistic. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/ICBM>.

Uranium Enrichment

Uranium enrichment is defined as “the process through which the isotopic proportion of U-235 is increased”.¹¹

Plutonium Reprocessing

Plutonium reprocessing is defined as “a series of chemical operations that separates plutonium from other nuclear waste”.¹²

Nuclear Deterrence

Nuclear deterrence is defined as “a principle in international relations where the retaliatory potential and destructive force of nuclear weapons prevents nations from launching a nuclear attack”.¹³

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The origins of the North Korean nuclear program

The genesis of the DPRK's nuclear program dates back to the aftermath of the Korean War, when the founder of the DPRK, Kim Il Sung, requested nuclear expertise from the Soviet Union in reaction to the stationing of American nuclear weapons in South Korea. In 1956, North Korea signed the founding charter of the USSR's Joint Institute for Nuclear Research and proceeded to send multiple scientists to the USSR for training. Following this, in 1965, the Soviet Union provided North Korea with an IRT-2000 research reactor, stationed at the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center.¹⁴ It is important to note that the reactor was initially adherent to IAEA safeguards in order to ensure that it was used exclusively for research rather than any form of nuclear weapons proliferation.

Although the program was originally intended to serve as a peaceful energy research project, as the DPRK was already protected by the threat of Soviet nuclear weapons, the government of North Korea slowly shifted the goal to a sovereign weapons program. In the late 1970s and through into the 1980s, North Korean engineers expanded the Yongbyon complex without any foreign assistance, managing to construct a 5MWe gas-graphite moderated reactor, which was capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium. The complex was also fitted with a radiochemical laboratory for plutonium reprocessing. The DPRK joined the Nuclear Non-

¹¹ International Atomic Energy Agency. “What is Uranium?” IAEA, 15 July 2025, www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/what-is-uranium.

¹² “Nuclear Reprocessing: Dangerous, Dirty, and Expensive.” *Union of Concerned Scientists*, 15 July 2008, www.ucs.org/resources/nuclear-reprocessing-dangerous-dirty-and-expensive.

¹³ Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. “Nucleusuggestingar Deterrence.” *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, carnegiecouncil.org/explore-engage/key-terms/nuclear-deterrence.

¹⁴ NTI. “Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center.” *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 22 Mar. 2022, www.nti.org/education-center/facilities/yongbyon-nuclear-research-center.

Proliferation Treaty in 1985 following pressure from the Soviet Union; however, it delayed the signing of the mandatory International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement until 1992, providing ample time to improve its nuclear capabilities without external supervision.¹⁵

The first nuclear crisis and the Agreed Framework

The global community became aware of the North Korean nuclear threat in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR, when the IAEA finally gained access to Yongbyon. By this point, the DPRK had lost its primary economic and security partner, which harmed its position when inspectors discovered significant discrepancies at Yongbyon, changes which suggested North Korea had separated more plutonium than it had declared. This culminated in 1993, when the IAEA requested a special inspection of undeclared nuclear waste sites, a request that was declined. Following this refusal, the DPRK threatened to withdraw from the NPT, marking the beginning of the first nuclear crisis.¹⁶

The crisis escalated to the brink of armed conflict until US President Jimmy Carter intervened in 1994, creating the US-DPRK Agreed Framework. Under this bilateral framework, the DPRK agreed to freeze the operation of and eventually dismantle its graphite-moderated reactors. In exchange, a US-led consortium would provide two light-water reactors, incapable of enriching plutonium, and oil to match the country's energy needs. For nearly a decade, the Agreed Framework successfully stalled North Korea's plutonium production, yet as mutual trust disappeared between the US and DPRK and the new reactor construction fell behind schedule, US intelligence discovered that the DPRK was pursuing a different means to achieve atomic weapons in order to circumvent the Agreed Framework.¹⁷

The collapse of the NPT and the Six-Party Talks

In October of 2002, the Agreed Framework was scrapped in its entirety when the United States confronted the North Korean government over its covert enrichment program. Washington soon froze shipments of oil to the DPRK, and in response, IAEA inspectors were expelled from the DPRK, and the Yongbyon reactor was restarted. In January 2003, North Korea formally withdrew from the NPT.¹⁸

In an attempt to manage the rapidly escalating crisis, China initiated the Six-Party Talks in August of 2003, bringing the United States, both North and South Korea, Japan, Russia, and, of course, China to the negotiating table. Amid the highly turbulent talks, a singular breakthrough

¹⁵ Mansourov, Alexandre Y. "The Origins, Evolution, and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program." *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 2, no. 3, Sept. 1995, pp. 25–38, suggesting, doi:10.1080/10736709508436590.

¹⁶ Britannica Editors. "Agreed Framework | US-NK Nuclear Deal and Diplomacy." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Jan. 2014, www.britannica.com/event/Agreed-Framework.

¹⁷ Britannica Editors. "Agreed Framework | US-NK Nuclear Deal and Diplomacy." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Jan. 2014, www.britannica.com/event/Agreed-Framework.

¹⁸ Britannica Editors. "Agreed Framework | US-NK Nuclear Deal and Diplomacy." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Jan. 2014, www.britannica.com/event/Agreed-Framework.

occurred in September 2005, when in a joint statement, North Korea agreed to abandon all nuclear development in exchange for international economic aid, energy assistance, and security guarantees.¹⁹

However, it took only a short time for the breakthrough deal to disintegrate, as disputes over financial sanctions and verification protocols delayed its implementation. The deal further deteriorated in October of 2006, when North Korea completed its first underground nuclear weapon detonation. Despite the weapon's relatively low yield, it pushed the UNSC to pass Resolution 1718, which began the modern era of incredibly restrictive sanctions against the DPRK. By 2009, following a second nuclear test, the Six-Party deal was officially scrapped by the North Korean government.²⁰

The Byungjin policy and the acceleration of nuclear development

Following the ascension of Kim Jong Un as the Supreme Leader of North Korea in 2011, the nuclear program was rapidly accelerated. The introduction of the Byungjin policy, which was the simultaneous development of the national economy and nuclear weapons, played a key role in this acceleration and provided the DPRK with four increasingly powerful nuclear weapons tests between 2013 and 2017, including a thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb test in September of 2017.²¹

North Korea also made enormous progress on its ballistic missile technology, alongside its nuclear weapon development. In 2017, it successfully tested the Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), demonstrating the country's ability to strike anywhere in the United States. This revelation prompted an era of intense rhetoric between the US and the DPRK, which pushed the situation closer to armed war than at any point since the 1950s.²²

The diplomatic progress and the subsequent collapse

The heightened tensions from 2017 briefly gave way to unprecedented diplomatic progress in 2018, with Kim Jong Un actively being engaged in large amounts. He met with the South Korean President Moon Jae-in and the US President Donald J. Trump. The 2018 Singapore Summit also managed to produce a commitment to the "complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula" from the North Korean government. However, just as quickly as progress began to

¹⁹ Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks Beijing, September 19, 2005. [2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm](https://2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm).

²⁰ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

²¹ Model Diplomat. "Kim Jong Un's Byungjin Policy." *Model Diplomat*, modeldiplomat.com/learn/glossary/kim-jong-un-byungjin-policy.

²² Writer, Michael Letkewicz Former Contributing. "The Byungjin Line and What It Means for North Korea's Defense Policy — THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW." *THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW*, 24 Aug. 2020, www.iar-gwu.org/blog/2017/11/24/the-byungjin-line-and-what-it-means-for-north-koreas-defense-policy.

appear, it collapsed entirely when, at the subsequent 2019 Hanoi Summit, the US demanded comprehensive denuclearisation prior to the lifting of sanctions, and the DPRK insisted on immediate sanctions relief in exchange for partial denuclearisation.²³

The failure of the Hanoi Summit became the beginning of an era of extreme North Korean isolation, which was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The DPRK abandoned its recent diplomatic outreach and instead enshrined its nuclear-armed status in its own constitution. By 2024, North Korea had also officially discarded its long-term goal of Korean reunification, instead labelling the South as its “invariable principal enemy”.²⁴

Recent developments

By 2026, North Korea's nuclear threat has grown substantially in both scale and sophistication. This was made all the more apparent when, in the latest of multiple public releases, the DPRK's state media released images of Kim Jong Un touring a new, highly advanced uranium enrichment facility, which the DPRK claims is operational as of June 2026. During the visit, the Supreme Leader also ordered that the DPRK's nuclear weaponry be augmented “at an exponential rate”.²⁵

Concurrently, North Korea has also focused on dispersing its nuclear weapons across its territory; for example, in May of 2026, live-fire tests of a modular missile launcher equivalent to a US HIMARS occurred, a system that has the capability of firing conventional and tactical ballistic missiles, which could be armed with nuclear warheads. The deliberate mix of conventional and nuclear weapon delivery systems dramatically lowers the threshold for nuclear weapon use and inherently complicates any potential conflict.²⁶

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea, sees its nuclear program not as a bargaining chip, but as a guarantee of the country's continued survival. Having observed the fall of regimes in Iraq and Libya after they abandoned or halted their WMD programs, the DPRK views nuclear deterrence as a necessity.²⁷ The country has proven itself

²³ Cheong, Wook-Sik. “The DPRK's Changed Nuclear Doctrine: Factors and Implications.” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2023, pp. 136–47, doi:10.1080/25751654.2023.2188859.

²⁴ Project MUSE -- Verification Required! muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/944266/pdf.

²⁵ KYODO NEWS. “Kim Says North Korea More Than Doubled Nuclear Material Production Capacity.” *Japan Wire by Kyodo News*, 4 June 2026, english.kyodonews.net/articles/-/77261.

²⁶ GuruFocus. “North Korea Tests New Mobile Missile Launcher Resembling U.S. Himars.” *Lockheed Martin Corp*, 27 May 2026, www.gurufocus.com/news/8885357/north-korea-tests-new-mobile-missile-launcher-resembling-us-himars?mobile=true.

²⁷ “Iran and Global Lessons in Nuclear Deterrence.” *Al Majalla*, 5 Apr. 2026, en.majalla.com/node/330441/politics/iran-and-global-lessons-nuclear-deterrence.

willing to endure strict international sanctions, extreme poverty, and near-total isolation in order to achieve and maintain its nuclear-armed status.²⁸

Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea, better known as South Korea, faces an existential threat from the DPRK, particularly due to its positioning within the range of thousands of conventional and nuclear weapons. Despite historically wavering between hard-line deterrence and mutual engagement policies, South Korea's current position has hardened significantly, particularly following the DPRK's 2024 declaration of South Korea as its primary enemy.²⁹ Following that statement, the Republic of Korea strengthened its military alliance with the United States by expanding joint military exercises and deeply integrating into the US extended nuclear deterrence framework.³⁰

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America has been leading the international initiative to denuclearise North Korea for the past thirty years, while also providing its extended deterrence to both South Korea and Japan, both close neighbours to the DPRK, while simultaneously staging large numbers of troops and military equipment in either country. The US's policy has stayed relatively similar across those last thirty years, demanding the Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Denuclearisation (CVID) of North Korea; however, as the capabilities of the North Korean nuclear arsenal have grown, discussion surrounding US policy has shifted toward risk reduction and arms control mechanisms rather than immediate and total disarmament, which remains the US's primary objective.³¹

People's Republic of China

Historically, China is the DPRK's most important ally, taking the role of its primary economic partner, with most of the DPRK's international trade being with China. The approach that the Chinese take with North Korea is one of balance, particularly considering that China opposes its nuclear-armed status. The primary worry is that those nuclear weapons will prompt an increase in the already large US military presence in Southeast Asia. However, China has also taken steps to ensure the renewed survival of the current North Korean state, fearing that a collapse would lead to mass refugee migration into China, and simultaneously bring a mixed US-South Korean military force straight to its border.³² Thus, while China has voted in favour of

²⁸ Kristensen, Hans M., et al. "North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 2024." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 80, no. 4, July 2024, pp. 251–71, doi:10.1080/00963402.2024.2365013.

²⁹ *Project MUSE -- Verification Required!* muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/944266/pdf.

³⁰ Ahn, Ho-Young. "Not a Time for Arms Control With North Korea." *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 19 Mar. 2026, www.csis.org/analysis/not-time-arms-control-north-korea.

³¹ Gardner, Cory. "US Policy Toward North Korea: Quo Vadis?" *Texas National Security Review*, 13 Nov. 2025, tnsr.org/2025/09/us-policy-toward-north-korea-quo-vadis.

³² Fong, Clara. "The China-North Korea Relationship." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 21 Nov. 2024, www.cfr.org/backgrounders/china-north-korea-relationship.

sanctions on the DPRK within the UNSC in the past, it has only enforced those that do not threaten the DPRK's survival. More recently, it has opposed sanctions in their entirety.³³

Russian Federation

From being a member of the Six-Party talks, Russia's contemporary role has changed dramatically, particularly in the 2020s. Having similarly been isolated by the West due to its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has now created a strong strategic and military alliance with the DPRK. The landmark June 2024 mutual defence pact and the exchange of North Korean weaponry for Russian technology have undermined global anti-proliferation efforts, which is compounded by Russia's willingness to shield the DPRK from within the UNSC.³⁴

Japan

Similarly to the Republic of Korea, Japan views the DPRK's nuclear program as a severe national security threat, with North Korean missiles routinely flying over Japanese airspace during testing. Japan's position is one of continued adherence to the existing strict sanctions on the DPRK and an insistence on the resolution of the international incident which occurred when Japanese nationals were abducted by North Korea throughout the 1970s and 1980s.³⁵

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

The International Atomic Energy Agency is the global intergovernmental forum for all matters concerning nuclear energy. The agency was expelled from the DPRK in 2009 and now relies on satellite imagery and intelligence to monitor North Korean nuclear development. The IAEA regularly reports to the UNSC regarding the North Korean nuclear program.³⁶

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

³³ Jazeera, Al. "North Korea Escapes Further Sanctions as Russia, China Wield Veto." *Al Jazeera*, 27 May 2022, www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/27/north-korea-escapes-further-sanction-as-russia-china-wield-veto.

³⁴ Hird, Karolina, et al. *North Korea Joins Russia's War Against Ukraine: Operational and Strategic Implications in Ukraine and Northeast Asia*. Institute for the Study of War, 25 Oct. 2024, understandingwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/North-Korea-Joins-Russias-War-Against-Ukraine-Operational-and-Strategic-Implications-in-Ukraine-and-Northeast-Asia-PDF.pdf.

³⁵ Headquarters of the Abduction Issue - Government of Japan. *Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea*. www.rachi.go.jp/jp/shisei/keihatsu/syosassi201510en.pdf.

³⁶ International Atomic Energy Agency. "IAEA Inspectors Depart DPRK." *International Atomic Energy Agency*, 16 June 2025, www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-inspectors-depart-dprk.

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
12 December 1985	The DPRK commits to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). ³⁷
12 March 1993	The DPRK announces its intention to withdraw from the NPT following the IAEA's demands for special inspections. ³⁸
21 October 1994	The US and the DPRK sign the Agreed Framework. ³⁹
10 January 2003	The DPRK formally withdraws from the NPT, and the Agreed Framework is scrapped. ⁴⁰
27 August 2003	The first Six-Party Talks begin. ⁴¹
19 September 2005	The Six-Party Talks provide a Joint Statement of denuclearisation for the DPRK. ⁴²
9 October 2006	The DPRK conducts its first nuclear weapons test. ⁴³

³⁷ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

³⁸ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

³⁹ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴⁰ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴¹ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴² Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴³ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

14 October 2006	The UNSC ratifies Resolution 1718. ⁴⁴
17 December 2011	Kim Jong Un rises to power and begins an era of acceleration for the DPRK's nuclear program. ⁴⁵
4 July 2017	The DPRK conducts its first Intercontinental Ballistic Missile test. ⁴⁶
3 September 2017	The DPRK conducts its first hydrogen weapon test. ⁴⁷
12 June 2018	The Singapore Summit occurs. ⁴⁸
28 February 2019	The Hanoi Summit occurs. ⁴⁹
9 September 2022	The DPRK passes a law allowing preemptive nuclear strikes. ⁵⁰
15 January 2024	The DPRK abandons its long-term unification goal. ⁵¹

⁴⁴ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴⁵ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴⁶ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴⁷ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴⁸ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁴⁹ Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022 | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁵⁰ North Korea Passes Nuclear Law | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-10/news/north-korea-passes-nuclear-law.

⁵¹ Project MUSE -- Verification Required! muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/944266/pdf.

19 June 2024	The Russia-DPRK mutual defence pact is signed. ⁵²
3 June 2026	The DPRK publicly unveils a new uranium enrichment facility. ⁵³

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

[Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\) \(March 5 1970\)](#)

The NPT is a central component of global nuclear non-proliferation and aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons while supporting the adoption of nuclear energy. The DPRK is the only country in the world to have signed the NPT and subsequently withdrawn from it; an action which sparked the nuclear crisis which continues today.

[UN Security Council Resolution 1718 \(S/RES/1718\) \(14 October 2006\)](#)

This resolution was adopted unanimously in response to the first North Korean nuclear test. It demanded that the DPRK rejoin the NPT and suspend ballistic missile activities. It also created a specialised UN sanctions committee to enforce embargoes on conventional weapons, WMD materials and luxury goods into North Korea.

[UN Security Council Resolution 1874 \(S/RES/1874\) \(12 June 2009\)](#)

This resolution was adopted in response to the DPRK's second nuclear test. It significantly expanded the sanctions placed upon North Korea and expanded the arms embargo to cover almost all imports and exports. The resolution also provided authorisation to UN Member States to search North Korean sea and air cargo for prohibited materials. The UN Panel of Experts was established to monitor sanctions compliance in this resolution.

[UN Security Council Resolution 2094 \(S/RES/2094\) \(7 March 2013\)](#)

This resolution was adopted in response to the DPRK's third nuclear test, and included measures such as significant sanctions expansion. More specifically, the resolution targeted the illegal financing of the North Korean government and nuclear program.

⁵² North Korea, Russia Strengthen Military Ties | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-07/news/north-korea-russia-strengthen-military-ties.

⁵³ Kim, Hyung-Jin, and Kim Tong-Hyung. "Kim Jong Un Says New Plant Boosts North Korea's Nuclear Forces | AP News." AP News, 4 June 2026, apnews.com/article/north-korea-kim-nuclear-uranium-8b8cb67751916637e0db62d6bc0147a2.

UN Security Council Resolution 2270 (S/RES/2270) (2 March 2016)

This resolution was adopted in response to the DPRK's fourth nuclear test, and introduced strict measures such as physical inspection of all goods destined for North Korea, while also banning the import of weapons and aviation fuel into the country.

UN Security Council Resolution 2371 (S/RES/2371) (5 August 2017)

This resolution was adopted unanimously during the highest point of tension of the North Korean ICBM crisis, and further targeted the government's financing by limiting foreign currency sources and banning coal, iron, lead, and seafood exports from the DPRK.

UN Security Council Resolution 2397 (S/RES/2397) (22 December 2017)

This resolution was adopted as the most severe sanctions package ever passed by the UNSC. It capped North Korean oil exports, and completely banned the export of textiles. It also required the repatriation of all North Korean workers in foreign countries within 24 months to prevent them from bringing currency to the regime.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The Agreed Framework

The first major diplomatic attempt at resolving the North Korean nuclear threat. The Agreed Framework was a bilateral framework that successfully paused the operation of the Yongbyon reactor, which was the DPRK's exclusive materials source for nuclear warheads. However, despite its short success, the Agreed Framework lacked both transparency and enforcement measures, particularly its lack of inspection mechanisms for undeclared sites, which allowed North Korea to continue its nuclear program clandestinely.⁵⁴

The Six-Party Talks

Following the total collapse of trust between the US and North Korea due to the failure of the Agreed Framework, the international community changed its approach from a strictly two-party, bilateral one to a multilateral one. The Six-Party Talks, which were chaired and organised by China, aimed to provide the DPRK with a security guarantee, and managed to produce a landmark joint statement in 2005.⁵⁵ Despite this, the talks repeatedly stalled as disagreements arose over the timeline of events proposed for disarmament and sanctions relief. The talks

⁵⁴ Britannica Editors. "Agreed Framework | US-NK Nuclear Deal and Diplomacy." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Jan. 2014, www.britannica.com/event/Agreed-Framework.

⁵⁵ Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks Beijing, September 19, 2005. 2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm.

completely collapsed following the refusal of formal verification methods by North Korea, which would have barred inspectors from military sites.⁵⁶

Economic Sanctions

Following the Six-Party Talks, the UNSC attempted to force compliance through the economic isolation of the DPRK. By 2017, the sanctions imposed by the Security Council covered all of North Korea's main civilian exports and imports.⁵⁷ However, the sanctions regime, while having economically isolated the DPRK, failed to prevent the continued development of the nuclear program. The North Korean government adapted to the sanctions through illegal trading networks such as ship-to-ship transfers while simultaneously deploying state-backed hacker groups to steal cryptocurrency, ultimately allowing the nuclear program to continue despite the sanctions.⁵⁸

Multilateral Summits

In a unique effort to resolve the nuclear crisis, the US and South Korea began a process of top-down diplomacy, with their respective presidents meeting with Kim Jong Un in person. While these summits initially managed to de-escalate tensions and pushed North Korea to impose a memorandum on its nuclear testing, the negotiations excluded the working-level negotiations needed in order to create working arms control measures. This issue came to a head during the Hanoi Summit, where both sides pushed their strict demands, ultimately leading to the collapse of negotiations.⁵⁹

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Staggered Sanctions Relief

Historically, it is obvious that demanding immediate denuclearisation is a strategy that simply doesn't work in the North Korean context. Pivoting from this, the Security Council could instead seek arms control measures. Targeted and, most importantly, incremental sanctions relief could be offered in exchange for a freeze of nuclear material production. Although considering North Korea's history of continually operating covert nuclear enrichment sites, verification should be a key component of such a solution. Any sanctions freeze should be tied to a robust verification protocol. Such a protocol could include joint use of on-site IAEA inspections and advanced satellite surveillance. This would effectively serve as a stop-gap

⁵⁶ NTI. "The Six-Party Talks and President Obama's North Korea Policy." *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 31 Jan. 2009, www.nti.org/analysis/articles/obamas-north-korea-policy.

⁵⁷ *Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy, 1985-2022* | Arms Control Association. www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chronology-us-north-korean-nuclear-and-missile-diplomacy-1985-2022.

⁵⁸ United Nations. *Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1874 (2009)*. 2019, digitallibrary.un.org/record/3826016/files/S_2019_691-EN.pdf.

⁵⁹ Cheong, Wook-Sik. "The DPRK's Changed Nuclear Doctrine: Factors and Implications." *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2023, pp. 136–47, doi:10.1080/25751654.2023.2188859.

measure to halt the exponential growth of the DPRK's nuclear capabilities while providing time for trust to be rebuilt.

Multilateral Negotiations with Neutral Mediators

Due to the ongoing tensions between the US, China, and Russia, frameworks such as the Six-Party talks have been made largely obsolete. A new multilateral forum for negotiations could serve as the evolution of those talks, particularly due to its inclusion of neutral mediators such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although ASEAN lacks experience and leverage when compared to traditional mediators, it has the alternative strength of comprising member states which maintain relations with both North Korea and Western powers. This allows them to appeal to either side of the negotiation as a non-threatening and reliable platform. The integration of neutral parties provides the DPRK with solid assurances while eliminating the geopolitical friction that continually freezes bilateral negotiations.

Expanding Cyber Sanctions and Resolving Maritime Loopholes

As the sanctions imposed by the Security Council lose effectiveness due to Russian and Chinese non-enforcement, it is only logical to shift targets to the DPRK's modern funding source, illicit trade and hacking. Considering that cyber-theft now comprises an overwhelming majority of the DPRK's nuclear program financing, the Security Council must treat it as a primary security threat. Such sanctions could include standardising international regulations for the exchange of cryptocurrency and stricter enforcement measures for maritime registries and insurance providers, in order to better detect vessels used by North Korea for illegal trade. More specifically, by enforcing strict Know-Your-Customer (KYC) regulations on cryptocurrency exchanges, the UNSC effectively allows for the tracing and the freezing of assets stolen by government-backed hackers. Additionally, by mandating the automatic revocation of flag-state registries and maritime insurance databases for ships caught conducting illegal ship-to-ship cargo transfers, the UNSC also disincentivises and disables ships which are involved in such operations.

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