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2018

Security Council

The issue of North Korea

Index

Introduction.....	3
Definition of key-terms.....	4
General Overview.....	7
Major parties involved and their views.....	12
Timeline of important events/Documents	16
UN involvement	19
Possible Solutions	21
List of Sources.....	22

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The issue of North Korea

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Introduction

Over the last three decades, the small, authoritarian, communist Asian country of North Korea has advanced in its nuclear weapons development program, raising concerns in most of the international community. A nuclear-armed North Korea (DPRK) presents an existential threat to all of its Asian neighbours as well as a danger to its main rival, the United States. As a result, the United Nations have relied on economic and financial sanctions to isolate the regime, led by Kim Jong-un, and start negotiations aimed at denuclearizing North Korea. However, these measures have not achieved a great impact in the North Korean economy due to the failure of some countries and companies to enforce the sanctions, thus also failing to achieve significant change in the country's policies.

The sanctions are imposed on North Korea's nuclear and missile development and its export of ballistic missile technology (especially ICBMs, which present an international threat).

For years, the international community has tried to negotiate a way out to the nuclear proliferation challenges the DPRK has posed since its withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003, the consequent end of the US-DPRK Agreed Framework, and the retreat of North Korea from the Six-Party talks in 2009. Since then, against international pressure, the DPRK has kept on developing its nuclear weapon programme and conducting nuclear tests, as well as exporting its missiles and helping other countries develop their own missile programmes.

The United Nations are looking for a solution to this issue before the tensions between the DPRK, its Asian neighbours and the US keep on rising, and the situation spirals out of control.

Definition of key-terms

Nuclear weapons

Weapons of mass destruction which explode by means of a nuclear reaction. They can either work through fission (the splitting of heavy atoms) or a combination of fission and fusion (combination of two lighter nuclei). This second kind is also known as a thermonuclear weapon or hydrogen bomb, and it is more modern and powerful. Nuclear weapons can cause extremely great damage through their detonation and the ensuing radiation left behind.

Nuclear weapons tests

Controlled detonations of nuclear weapons to assess their power, effectiveness and behaviour. Can be carried out underground, underwater, on land or even at high altitudes.

Nuclear reactors

Devices that can start and sustain a series of nuclear fissions. They can be used to generate energy, carry forward research, and produce radioactive isotopes, which may be employed to develop nuclear weapons.

Intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)

Guided missile with a range of more than 5,500 km capable of delivering nuclear, chemical, biological or conventional weapons to a specific location.

Anti-ballistic missile

Weapon designed to intercept and destroy ballistic missiles, including ICBMs.

Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ)

Area 4 km wide surrounding the border between North and South Korea, serving as a buffer zone in which military installations or activities are forbidden. Over the years, there have been a number of incidents and incursions. The area is one of the most tense in the world, and its borders are heavily militarised.

Armistice

Formal agreement between two or more countries or groups at war to stop fighting (cessation of hostilities). This does not imply that the war itself has ended; under international law, the factions are still considered to be at war until a formal peace treaty is agreed upon.

International sanctions

Measures taken by a nation, a group of nations or an international body against another country, generally with the intention of applying pressure to the sanctioned country in order to make it comply with their demands and change its behaviour, or to punish it for its actions. The term is mostly used to refer to economic sanctions, which can include different forms of trade barriers, financial restrictions and embargos.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

International treaty aiming at preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and promoting nuclear disarmament. The treaty establishes that the five members of the Security Council are allowed to possess nuclear weapons, while the other countries do not have legal permission to develop them. More countries have adhered to this treaty than any other weapons limitation treaty, yet North Korea is not currently a part of it.

Agreed Framework

Agreement between the US and North Korea signed in 1994 through which North Korea committed to freeze its nuclear weapons development program in exchange for two proliferation-resistant nuclear reactors. Although the agreement slowed down the development of nuclear weapons by the North, it ultimately collapsed, leading to the Six-Party talks.

Juche

North Korean political ideology which emphasizes autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency in the economy, politics and defence, and also includes many socialist and communist elements.

Cyber Attack

Attempt to gain illegal access to a computer system, by individuals or states, with different methods and purposes, such as obtaining classified information or causing failures in a country's infrastructure.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International organisation under the scope of the UN which promotes the peaceful and safe use of nuclear energy and works towards stopping the use of nuclear power for military purposes. The agency controls the application of nuclear-proliferation related treaties and resolutions.

General Overview

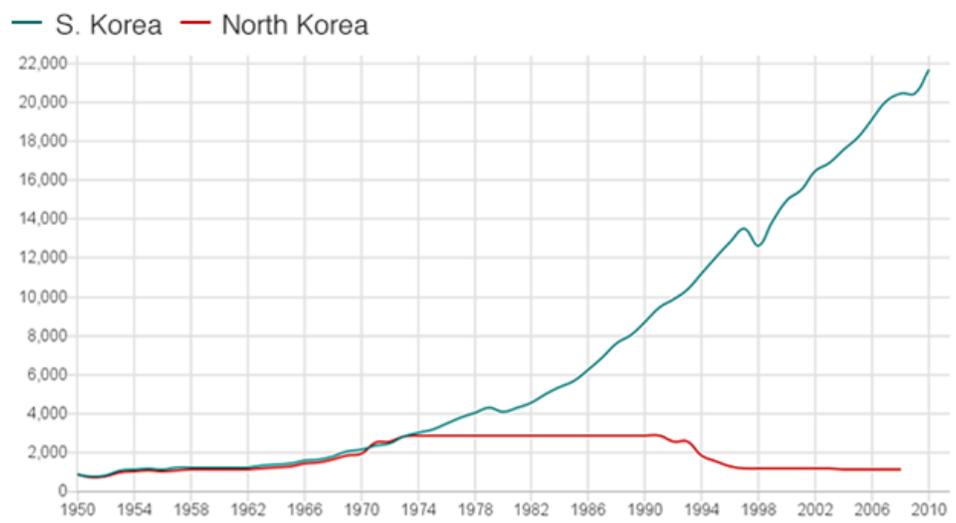
The History of North Korea

The history of the DPRK began with the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II, leaving a Korean peninsula administered in the South by the United States and the in North by the Soviet Union, divided by the 38th parallel. This led to the establishment of two separate governments in 1948, where both sides claimed to be the legitimate government and representative of the entirety of the Korean people.

The Korean War began in 1950 when Kim Il-sung, the North Korean leader, attempted to unify Korea through military force by invading the Republic of Korea (South Korea) with the support of the Soviet Union and China. South Korea was supported by the United States and UN forces. In 1953 both sides signed an armistice, ending major hostilities.

From the end of the Korean War to the 1970s the DPRK was considered to be a successful state, even having a higher GDP per capita than the Republic of Korea. Kim Il-sung remodelled the society along the lines of **Juche**- North Korean radical nationalistic ideology promoting their autonomy. But this success started to decline, and the situation got worse after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. This was when North Korea started to become even more isolated from the international community.

GDP per capita in USD, 1950-2010



During the 1990s, North Korea suffered its Great Famine, where between 800,000 and 1,500,000 people died of starvation, disease or sickness due to lack of food. This happened due to the uneven distribution of food, droughts and floods. Since then, North Korea relies on food aid and it still has not resumed its self-sufficiency in food production.

All of these circumstances, coupled with the death of DPRK's leader Kim Il-sung in 1994, led North Korea to feel at a disadvantage with its "rival", the United States, and consequently impelled the country to develop its nuclear program to ensure its security.

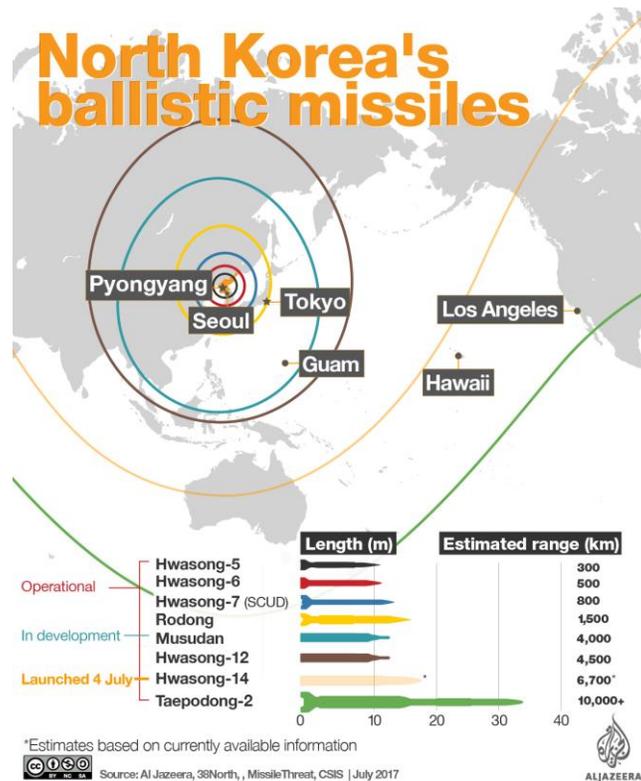
North Korea is led by a secretive, authoritarian communist government., which has turned more ruthless since Kim Jong-un got to power in 2011. The country still works with a one-party system, where political rights are inexistent for common civilians. The government makes extensive use of propaganda to generate a cult of personality around its leader, and suppresses any possibility of an opposition arising. Kim Jong-un has been known to sentence to death some of his close relatives in government positions. The country relies heavily on Chinese support, particularly in the economic front. As a result of years of economic mismanagement and economic sanctions, living conditions for the average North Korean are poor and the country lacks development in many areas. After years of committing a significant part of its resources to nuclear development, North Korea now possesses an **ICBM** capable of reaching the whole of the US, and it has thermonuclear weapons; it is still unclear if it can mount one of its 80 nuclear devices (approximately) on its largest ICBM.

The reopening of the nuclear program

North Korea's dictators have long believed that their nuclear weapons will ensure the survival of their regime against the United States' military power. The United States and all the international community have taken several measures to denuclearize the peninsula;

- In the 1990s the US negotiated the Agreed Framework with the DPRK. This was an agreement between the US and North Korea through which North Korea committed to freeze its nuclear weapons development program in exchange for two proliferation-resistant nuclear reactors. However, this agreement broke down in 2002 when **North Korea's clandestine uranium enrichment program** came to light.

- After the Agreed Framework broke down, the People’s Republic of China assembled the Six-Party Talks, between North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, the United States and Russia, to negotiate denuclearization. But these talks stopped after many North Korean **nuclear and missile tests**, leading to increasing international sanctions against the DPRK.



International Threat

North Korea presents a threat because of its **nuclear weapons development**. It uses this power to threaten other nations, especially Japan, South Korea and the United States.

“The four islands of the [Japanese] archipelago should be sunken into the sea by the nuclear bomb of Juche,” the committee of Kim Jong-un and his followers said. “Japan is no longer needed to exist near us,” it added.

North Korea has also threatened to “reduce the US mainland into ashes and darkness” when the United States presented a resolution that was unanimously approved in the UN, after North Korea fired a ballistic missile towards Japan.

This means that North Korea is a threat to safety and democracy for the international community.

Export of Weapons

North Korea not only produces its own weapons, but it also exports its missiles to other countries as well as helping them develop their own local missile production. Some of these countries include Iran, Libya and Syria. This could be considered a threat to international security, since the countries to which weapons are sold are also seen as unstable or potentially aggressive by the international community.



*The countries in blue and green are those to whom DPRK sells or has sold missiles.

Avoiding Sanctions

The DPRK and other countries are finding ways not to comply with the UN sanctions.

For example, many North Korean civilians are transferred abroad by the state and ordered to work and send back the much-needed foreign currency from their salaries, to somehow make up for the UN financial sanctions. These **overseas workers** migrate to countries like China, Qatar and Malaysia.

Otherwise, North Korea has used methods ranging from arms trafficking to illegal drugs sales to obtain foreign currency and finance its nuclear programme.

From March 2014 to January 2017 49 countries were estimated to have violated the sanctions imposed on North Korea.

Out of all of these, China is one of the countries that reportedly has been breaking the UNSC sanctions by trading oil products with the DPRK. Also, Russia allegedly supplied the DPRK with fuel as well as importing North Korean coal.



Countries that violated international sanctions on North Korea.

Major parties involved and their views

The United States of America

The US, as the symbol of Western capitalist dominance, is the largest target of North Korean threats. Its presidents have tried different methods to prevent North Korea from obtaining and maintaining nuclear weapons, ranging from economic sanctions to attempts of negotiations, or just having “strategic patience”. Since late 2017, the US has been within range for North Korean missiles, which has raised the alarm in the country. President Donald Trump started to address the conflict by engaging in a rhetorical confrontation with Kim Jong-un, but in recent times he seems to be seeking a more conciliatory approach. It should be considered that the US has important interests in the East Asian region: two of its main allies, Japan and South Korea, are located in the area, as well as China, which is starting to emerge as a threat to US hegemony. The US is also concerned about the possible exchange of information and materials regarding nuclear technology from North Korea to other states and even non-state actors.

Military forces on the Korean Peninsula



Source: James Martin Centre for Non-proliferation Studies/Council on Foreign Relations **BB**

South Korea (ROK)

The Republic of Korea has long been threatened by the DPRK, not only because of their geographical position (they share the Korean peninsula) but because of the history of conflict between them since the Korean War. Both countries claim to be the legitimate leaders of the Korean peninsula, and even though efforts have been made to unite the Koreas they all have successively failed, especially because of their different government ideologies and structures. Because of political, ideological and economic reasons, more than 30.000 North Koreans have sought refuge in the ROK, peaking in the 1990s because of the Great Famine. Moon Jae-in, the South Korean president, is reportedly making efforts to restore the **Sunshine Policy** (ROK policy for an amicable relationship with the DPRK which was declared a failure in 2010 after the 2009 North Korean nuclear test) and the countries have experienced a joint participation in the Winter Olympics. Still South Korea is seen as an enemy to the DPRK because of its military alliance with the United States.

China

China has been the main ally of North Korea for decades. North Korea's main trading partner is China, and the country depends a lot on China's diplomatic protection. China has traditionally opposed increased sanctions on the regime (and in cases failed to enforce them); however, Kim's nuclear tests have irritated the Chinese, and the relationship has shown some deterioration. Still, China has an interest in keeping the North Korean regime strong: it wants to avoid a regime change, which would surely generate a large influx of refugees through the frontier, and it would not like to have a US-allied country right at its border in such a heated region as East Asia. It is very likely that China has aided North Korea in its development of nuclear weapons in the past. For China, keeping the peninsula stable seems to be a higher priority than achieving the denuclearization of North Korea.

Russia

The **Soviet Union** gave crucial support to North Korea in the economic, diplomatic and military sense. After its collapse, links with the DPRK have been less stable. Russia is concerned by a possible destabilization of the region, and has favoured economic sanctions in the past; however, it opposes any use of force against DPRK. Still, Russia has often failed to meet its commitments under UN economic sanctions. This decision could be influenced by the fact

that trading with North Korea helps Russia develop its Far East. However, it also has global implications: Vladimir Putin seeks to restore Russia's position as a global superpower, and it does not want to be left out of the negotiations regarding North Korea.

Japan

As a capitalist ally of the US which hosts American military bases, Japan is regarded by North Korea as an enemy and the island nation is often a target of its threats. Tensions have historical roots: Japan occupied Korea for decades until World War 2, and during the 1970s and 1980s a number of Japanese civilians were abducted by North Korean agents. Many of North Korea's missile tests have resulted in missiles falling in the Sea of Japan, which has further increased hostility. Japan is within the range of North Korean missiles and it could potentially be struck by nuclear weapons, which is a great concern for the Japanese government. Shinzo Abe, Japan's Prime Minister, has historically favoured hard measures against North Korea, such as increasing economic sanctions.

Timeline of important events/Documents

1945: World War 2 ends; the Korean Peninsula, formerly occupied by the Japanese, is divided along the 38th parallel between Soviet occupation to the North, and US occupation in the South.

1948: Kim Il-sung, leader of the Workers' Party of Korea, proclaims the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which is established in the North with Soviet support.

1950: Communist troops from the North invade the South, starting the Korean War.

1950-1953: Korean War unfolds. The communist North is backed by the Soviets and China; the South has American and UN support. The war leaves over a million civilians and soldiers dead, and causes major destruction.

1953: Korean War ends, after an armistice is signed between the parties establishing a border similar to the one existing before the war. No formal peace treaty is signed.

1960s: North Korea experiences significant growth and industrial development.

1972: The two Koreas agree to cooperate peacefully to achieve reunification of the Peninsula.

1970s - 1980s: Numerous incidents take place, such as assassination attempts by the North against South Korean presidents, border skirmishes, and shooting down of US and South



The Kim dynasty: Kim Il-sung (1948-1994), Kim Jong-il (1994-2011), Kim Jong-Un (2011-)

Korean planes, also by the North.

1985: North Korea joins the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Treaty bans North Korea from developing or having nuclear weapons.

1991: North and South Korea join the UN.

1993: The IAEA declares that North Korea is not adhering to its obligations under the NPT.

1994: Kim Il-sung dies. He is replaced by his son, Kim Jong-il.

1994: An “Agreed Framework” is reached between the US and North Korea. The Asian country promises to stop its nuclear weapons development program in exchange for aid and two nuclear reactors for energy purposes.

1994-1998: After losing Soviet support, economic mismanagement and climatic factors lead to a famine in North Korea that kills at least hundreds of thousands.

2002: President Bush includes North Korea in the “Axis of Evil” for its development of “weapons of mass destruction”.

2003: North Korea withdraws from the NPT, amidst growing concerns regarding its nuclear weapons development programme.

2003: Six-Party talks begin between North Korea, South Korea, the US, Russia, China and Japan, with the aim of negotiating a peaceful end to North Korea’s nuclear programme. The talks are unsuccessful.

2006: North Korea tests nuclear weapons for the first time. As a result, the UN imposes economic sanctions. Tensions build up between North Korea and the international community.

2011: Kim Jong-il dies. He is replaced by his son, Kim Jong-un.

2011-2016: Tensions continue to rise, as North Korea carries forward more nuclear weapons and missile tests, some more successful than others. The international community responds by imposing increasingly tight economic sanctions and attempting to limit DPRK’s access to supplies for weapons construction.

2017: Throughout the year, newly elected US president Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un further escalate tensions through mutual threats and aggressive rhetoric.

- May: Moon Jae-in becomes president of South Korea. He takes a more conciliatory stance and is more willing to negotiate with the North than his predecessor.

- July: North Korea claims to have successfully tested an ICBM that could reach continental US.
- September: A seismic event is detected which indicates that North Korea has successfully tested a thermonuclear device for the first time.
- December: The US accuses North Korea of being responsible for the WannaCry cyberattack from earlier that year, which affected infrastructure and companies of different countries around the world.

2018:

- February: in an effort to deescalate tensions, North and South Korea participate in the PyeongChang Winter Olympics under the same Korean Unification flag.
- March: Through South Korean mediation, the US and North Korea agree to hold talks in the near future.
- April: Kim Jong-un meets South Korean president Moon Jae-in in South Korea, becoming the first North Korean leader to cross the border. They agree to work towards a formal peace treaty and the denuclearization of the peninsula. North Korea promises to halt all nuclear and missile tests.

UN involvement

The United Nations adopted 21 resolutions regarding the non-proliferation of the DPRK, most of them enforcing sanctions because of North Korea's nuclear and missile development and tests. Pyongyang has been under UN sanctions since the 2006 **resolution 1718** of the Security Council, following the nuclear test conducted by the DPRK in the same year. Since then, more resolutions have been passed applying more sanctions after several more missile and nuclear tests. The last resolution adopted on the matter by the Security Council was **resolution 2407** in 2018, which extends the mandate of previous resolutions and sanctions until April 24 2019.

Other relevant UN Security Council Resolutions include **Resolutions 1874, 2087, 2094, 2270, 2321, 2371, 2375 and 2397**. Most of them follow a North Korean missile or nuclear test, and progressively restrict the country's ability to trade with other nations, obtain financing, and sell or purchase resources that are either important for the country's economy or for its nuclear weapons programme.

The UN has also been significantly involved in the issue through the IAEA. This UN agency was the one responsible for verifying that North Korea followed its obligations whenever a treaty or agreement was signed. However, the agency's experts have repeatedly faced obstructions and outright expulsion from the DPRK, which makes their task harder.

Sanctions Against North Korea

Chronology of international action against the rogue state

● Sanctions resolutions



Possible Solutions

The issue of North Korea has been a threat to peace for decades, and it has escalated over the recent years to critical levels. A diplomatic alternative is to negotiate an **agreement** between North Korea and the international community in which the country commits to give up its nuclear weapons programme in exchange for the lifting of sanctions and other elements, like the removal of American troops in South Korea. Such a deal would require better enforcement than past attempts, to ensure that North Korea really gives up its weapons.

If North Korea shows unwillingness to negotiate, the international community can try to further **apply pressure** on the regime by persisting with economic sanctions until the country is no longer able to sustain its condition and is forced to give in to the demands of the Security Council. Sanctions have had an effect on the North Korean economy and the living conditions of its people; failing to reverse this situation could cause unrest within the country and pose a threat to Kim Jong-un's regime, thus forcing him to negotiate. For this option to work, Chinese cooperation in enforcing sanctions would be essential, since the North Korean economy is largely dependent on trade with China.

Finally, a more limited approach would be to **accept that North Korea is now a nuclear power**, and manage the situation assuming that this cannot be changed. The international community could wait for a gradual opening of the country, or for a very unlikely internal regime change. In any case, this option would present a number of other challenges regarding the recognition of countries like India or Israel as legitimate nuclear powers.

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